

# Vechol Maaminim

"A Weekly Leaflet From "Bnei Emunim



## IN THE PATHWAYS OF FAITH

## Divrei Torah About Amen and Tefillah in the Parashah

### Offending Another Person Delays Acceptance of the Tefillah

"ויאמר יהודה אל אחיו מה בצע כי נהרג את אחינו וכסינו את דמו" (לז כו)

**Rabbeinu Ephraim** writes that the word "בצ" is an acronym for the three times of *tefillah*, morning, afternoon and evening. He explained Yehudah's words to his brothers as follows: "*mah betza ki naharog es achinu*" – if we kill him, what value will the *tefillas* that we offer morning, afternoon and evening have? The *passuk* states (*Yeshayah* 1:15): "Even when you pray at length, I do not hear; your hands are full of blood."

The *Pardes Yosef* explains this as an additional source for the *takanah* of the Arizal to say before davening: "I hereby accept upon myself the *mitzvas aseh* of *v'ahavta le'reiacha kamocha*" (*Magen Avraham* beginning of 46). "*Mah betza*," what value do our *tefillas* have "*ki naharog es achinu*" – if we are not careful about respecting one another.

*Peirush Rabbeinu Ephraim al HaTorah; Pardes Yosef Kedoshim*

### Shaarei Gan Eden – In This World

"ויקמו כל בניו וכל בנותיו לנחמו וימאן להתנחם" (לז לה) The *Kli Yakar* writes:

"*Rashi* explains: Only for the dead was it decreed that he be forgotten, but not for the living. The reason for this is that the primary comfort is when the live person realizes that the deceased person merits all the good that is in store for the righteous, and that he has been taken from a dark world to one of eternal light...And Yaakov saw in *ruach hakodesh* that Yosef was not in Gan Eden, and therefore, 'and he refused to be comforted.'"

**Harav Pinchas of Koritz** once remarked about one of the *tzaddikim*: "I see him in Gan Eden, but he has not yet reached the path of truth." One of the listeners was surprised by this, and asked: Isn't Rabbeinu in this world; how does he know what is happening in

### A Segulah for Hatavas Chalom To Give the "Kos" on a "Kaf"

"ואתן את הכוס על כף פרעה" (מ יא)

**Harav Yaakov Dov Marmorstein, Nasi** of Bney Emunim, explained:

"הכוס" is numerically equivalent to "amen." "כף" is numerically equivalent to 100. If we want to serve Hashem as befits the King of kings, we have to make sure to give the "*kos al kaf*" – to complete each one of the hundred *brachos* by answering amen. Furthermore, the *passuk* alludes to the words of *Chazal* (*Brachos* 53b): "The one who answers amen is greater than one making the brachah: '*v'etein es hakos al kaf*' – the *kos* is greater than the *kaf*."

Gan Eden? Rav Pinchas then replied:

"*Chazal* say (*Shabbos* 119b): 'One who answers amen with all his might, the gates to Gan Eden are open for him.' They did not say '*yiftechu*', they will be opened – in the future tense, but rather, they are open, in the present, to teach us that while a person is still living in this world, he merits to have the gates of Gan Eden open to him, and he can see what is happening inside. However, all this is conditional on him answering amen – with all his might," he answered, and did not expound.

*Shomer Emunim, Ma'amar Pischu Shearim 2*

### "A Decree on the Dead" - As Relatives Do Not Daven for Them

"ויקמו כל בניו וכל בנותיו לנחמו וימאן להתנחם" (לז לה)

"A person cannot accept consolation for one who is alive, but is thought to be dead, because only for the dead was it decreed that he be forgotten but not for the living." (*Rashi*, based on *Bereishi Rabbah* 84 21).

The question here seems simple: Is it a 'decree' that the deceased person is forgotten

from the heart? Isn't is a good thing for the relatives to forget the death of their loved ones and be comforted?

**Harav Dovid Shperber**, the Gaavad of Barashov, explained:

Indeed, that is why *Rashi* was specific in his language: "*she'al hameis nigzerah gezeirah*" – the decree is on the deceased and not on his relatives, because the soul of the deceased does not want to be forgotten from his relatives' hearts. If they remember him, they will give *tzeddakah* and daven for his soul to rise every higher. But HaKadosh Baruch Hu, Who does not want people to feel distraught, decreed that the dead person should be forgotten from the heart, to prevent the relatives from feeling the pain.

*Eretz Binyamin* p. 83

### A Birthday – A Day to Daven

"ויהי ביום השלישי יום הולדת את פרעה ויעש משתה לכל עבדיו" (מ כ)

In contrast to Pharaoh, who celebrated his birthday by making a 'party for all his servants' many *gedolei Yisrael* would utilize this special day for *tefillah* and pleading. The **Ponevezher Rav** related that when he once remarked to his *rebbe*, the **Chofetz Chaim** that it was his birthday, the Chofetz Chaim said to him: "Know that the birthday is a day that is auspicious for *tefillah* and *bakashah*, as explained from the words of the *passuk* (*Tehillim* 2: 7-8): "*Ani hayom yelideticha – she'al mimeni v'etna*, today I have begotten you...request of Me and I will give."

**Harav Yechiel Yaakov of Kozhnitz** also taught that the words of the *passuk* "*She'al mimeni v'etnah*" sounds like a promise, that on the birthday a person is guaranteed that from Above, his requests will be fulfilled.

*Sifran Shel Tzaddikim, Ma'areches 31, 2; Ginzei Shaarei Tzion*, p. 82

## Listen Well and Answer Amen

Wednesday, Rosh Chodesh Teves, will mark the *yahrtzeit* of one of the eminent *poskim*, Harav Yair Chaim Bachrach, author of *Chavas Yair*. The *Chavas Yair* writes in his compilation *Mekor Chaim* on the *Shulchan Aruch* (*Orach Chaim* 46 2) regarding answering amen after *Birchos Hashachar* in shul:

**"I saw a practice among the veteran, elder people, who are far from the *shaliach tzibbur*, that they leave their places and come closer to the one making the *brachos*, in order to hear him well and answer amen."**



The Brachah of HaMeichin Mitzadei Gaver

"Mashveh Raglai K'ayalos"

The Rambam writes (*Tefillah* 7 6) that "when a person prepares to set out on the way, he makes the *brachah* 'Baruch Atah Hashem...HaMeichin mitzadei gaver.'" Rabbeinu Manoach of Narvona (*Tefillah* 7 6) explains the words of the Rambam in the simple way that with this *brachah*, instituted based on the words of the *passuk* (*Tehillim* 37:23) "Mei'Hashem mitzadei gaver konanu vedarko yechpatz, from Hashem, a mighty man's steps are established, for He delights in his way." We thank Hashem for creating our legs in a way that we can use them to walk wherever we need to go.

Because we are used to walking from a very early age, one could assume that doing so is a simple matter, if not for the fact that *Chazal* open our eyes through this *brachah*. The purpose is to introspect into what remarkable wisdom is contained in the power of walking granted to a person. A person's legs are built in such a complex, unique fashion, and make it possible for him to walk confidently, without using his hands, like other creatures. Each step that a person takes is comprised of myriad coordinated actions of nerves, muscles, bones and joints, which together, we make it possible for him to walk in comfort, stability, and even on steep roads and paths and difficult terrain.

"To Guard You On All Your Paths"

As noted, this *brachah* is based on the words (*Tehillim* 37:23): "Mei'Hashem mitzadei gaver konanu vedarko yechpatz." Some cite an additional *passuk* as a source for this *brachah* (*Mishlei* 16:9): "Lev adam yechashev darko v'Hashem yachin tze'ado, a man's heart plans his way, but Hashem prepares his step." (*Siddur Tzelosa d'Avraham*, p. 49)

The commentaries (see *Rashi*; *Metzudas Dovid* and others) explain the *passuk* from *Tehillim* to mean: The processions of a person in this world with his engagement in Torah and *mitzvos* and *l'havdil* his more mundane dealings. Indeed, there are Rishonim that are of the opinion that in this *brachah*, we do not thank Hashem for the literal health of our legs. Rather, we thank Him for giving us success in every path that we take, sometimes, without us even feeling it. In the morning, before we leave the house to wherever we need to go, we are instructed to give gratitude to HaKadosh Baruch Hu for accompanying us every step of the way and guarding our steps. (*Avudraham Hashkamas Haboker uBirchos Hashachar; Peirush Hatefillos Vehabrachos*, Rav Y. Bar Yakar, Vol. II, p. 20)

The *Siach Yitzchak* writes: "A person must give thanks to Hashem Yisbarach for each and every step that he takes...A person is destined to experience bad things and the travails of the times, as the poet said, *ein rega belo pega*, there is no moment without harm. HaKadosh Baruch Hu, in His great compassion, guards a person's steps from bad things."

The *Seder Hayom (Seder Birchos Hashachar)* writes that in this *brachah*,

Baruch Atah Hashem Elokeinu Melech Ha'olam HaMeichin - for preparing and creating mitzadei gaver - two legs with which I can easily and comfortably walk to any place I want.

Amen - it is true that we have to thank Hashem for creating our legs so that we can walk with them.

we also thank Hashem for giving us the choice to go to wherever we would like. He adds that we have to ask in this *brachah* that Hashem should guide us on the good path, so that we should not stumble, *chalilah*, on the path that we take.

Bechol Derechecha Da'eihu

The Chassidic giants explained that the *passuk* "Mei'Hashem mitzadei gaver konanu" reminds us of the fact that HaKadosh Baruch Hu is the One that guides a person's steps in this world. A person has no idea what Hashem has in store for him, and how many steps He has allocated for the person to walk in his life, and therefore, he mistakenly thinks that he is going to attend to his affairs, as the *passuk* says "vedarko yechpatz." However, he must recognize the truth that wherever he goes, he has been sent there from Above for the most important purpose that he is not even aware of. (*Degel Machaneh Ephraim Masei; Ginzei Yosef*, *ibid.*)

The Chofetz Chaim adds that a person is obligated to guard his steps, and not to waste them. Rather, he should go to do a mitzvah or to attend to his health, because with every step that a person takes, he is an emissary of Hashem. (*Mimichtavei Harav Chofetz Chaim*, p. 115)

"Mei'Hashem Mitzadei Gaver Konanu"

The following story about Harav Yehonasan Eibeshitz indicates to what extent a person needs assistance from Above every single step of the way:

Once, Rav Yehonasan was in the city of Vienna, where the royal family was based. As he walked towards his lodgings, the king met him and asked, "Where are you headed?" Rav Yehonasan thought for a moment and replied: "I do not know." When he heard this puzzling answer, the king became angry and instructed that Rav Yehonasan to be thrown into prison.

A short time later, the king's anger abated, and he said to himself: A wise and dignified man like Rav Yehonasan surely would not have spoken nonsense. There must be some deep meaning to his response, and I should listen to his explanation. The king instructed that Rav Yehonasan be brought before him. When the Rav came, the king asked: "You were probably heading to someplace specific; why did you reply to me that you didn't know where you were going?"

"If the king would have asked me where I want to go," Rav Yehonasan gave his winning answer, "I would have immediately said, 'to my lodgings.' But because the king asked, 'where are you heading', I could not have replied anything but the right answer: I do not know! As the king can see, I did not get to my lodgings, and instead landed up in jail..." These words found favor in the king's eyes and Rav Yehonasan was set free. (*Peninim MeiRav Y. Eibeshitz*, p. 464)

"Vechol Ma'aminim" - With No Exceptions

The Chabad *mashpia* Harav Mendel Futerfas, zt"l, was known for his outstanding *Yiras Shamayim* and his *dveikus* to Torah and *mitzvos*, with great *mesirus nefesh*.

One of the most inspiring chapters of his spiritual life were the ten years that he spent in the Soviet prison camps, which were notorious for their brutal living conditions. Despite the harsh environment, Reb Mendel did not give up even the most minor of his holy practices. Even before he was exiled to the camps, when his sentence of ten years in hard labor was read out, he immediately stood up and pleaded with the judge: "Please, I'm ready to sit in prison even twenty years, or to work 16 hours a day instead of eight, on condition that you exempt me from working on Shabbos."

After he was released, Reb Mendel related that indeed, throughout his years in Siberia, he was able to avoid desecrating Shabbos entirely. He also was able to keep his beard intact throughout his incarceration.

Over the years, Reb Mendel shared with those close to him a bit of what he had endured during those times. He related the following story, emphasizing that every detail is true, and there is nothing exaggerated:

Reb Mendel spent the first period of his incarceration in a certain prison, and later he was moved to another one. After a few years, he was returned to the first prison camp. The day he returned was Erev Yom Kippur, and Reb Mendel sat in a corner, with his few possessions, and tried to remember the *tefillah* of *Kol Nidrei* that was supposed to be said towards evening. Because the communists, in their evil brutality, tried to do everything possible to prevent some type of normal life in the camp, they would exhaust the prisoners with long, unnecessary interrogations. Reb Mendel knew that on the day of his arrival at the prison camp, he would be subject to such an interrogation, and he didn't know if he would be able to say *Kol Nidrei* afterwards. So he decided to say the *tefillah* right then, while he was waiting for the prolonged interrogation. The next day, Yom Kippur, the prisoners were forced to go on the daily 'outing' that this specific camp instituted. It is impossible to know why this humiliating, exhausting experience was dubbed an 'outing' as if there was any leisure or fun involved. In fact, it was a monotonous fifteen-minute walk around a circular area. Each person walked alone, and he was not allowed to exchange a word with another person, or even look in the direction of someone else. Each one had to walk with their eyes lowered to the floor. Armed guards observed them to make sure they were following instructions.

It was Reb Mendel's first time on this 'outing', and he chose to use the time to whisper whatever he remembered of the *tefillos* of the day. So, while he was walking by himself, without shoes on his feet because it was Yom Kippur, his eyes fixed into the floor, and his lips murmuring the *piyut* of *Vechol Ma'aminim*, a powerful question came to his mind. "How can I declare 'vechol ma'aminim' at a time when the evil regime, that has declared its intent for heresy, is controlling us, and even many of Bnei Yisrael have been swept up by this heretic communist ideology that has tried to eradicate every shred of *emunah* from all hearts?"

The question pierced his mind, but Reb Mendel, well aware of the words of *tzaddikim* that questions in *emunah* come from the impure *klipah*, strained to remove it from his mind. He tried to continue humming the holy words of "Vechol Ma'aminim" until the question passed from his mind. Reb Mendel was in that camp for twenty eight days, as a stopover on his way to even

further exile, to one of the remote labor camps in the frosty Siberia. After twenty eight days, when a sufficient number of prisoners had accumulated, Reb Mendel and several hundred others like them, were sent on a very long, tiring journey to Siberia. When they arrived, they discovered to their horror, that the camps they had been in until then were a hotel compared to the horrific conditions in the new place. They needed to sleep on wooden bunks, which were little more than three tiers of shelves' thirty people were stuffed onto each shelf, side by side. In all, about 200 people were stuffed into each room, and forced to breathe the same stale air.

Reb Mendel looked around trying to find a familiar face. Most of the inmates were coarse gentiles, and a few were Jews, most of whom looked like non-Jews. He needed to make a significant effort until he was finally able to identify a Jewish face on the upper tier near the ceiling.

He was an elderly Jew, and it was clear from his pallor that he was very weak. Reb Mendel went up and asked him how he was doing and who he was. The man related that he was a native of Brisk, Lithuania. His father was a chareidi Jew, but already as a child, he had tended towards communism. So when he was just ten years old, he fled from his parents' home and joined a group of youngsters who had become enthused by communism. From there, he rose up the ladder of the ranks, and became a senior communist official.

"For the past fifty years, I have been totally disconnected from anything Jewish," the tortured old man told Reb Mendel. "Throughout these years, I have lived in total heresy, and of course, I never fasted on Yom Kippur. Somehow, it happened that I landed up here for something that was perceived as a 'crime' in the eyes of the senior Communist officials. And on Erev Yom Kippur this year, as I was walking, brokenly, among the huts of the camp, an unfamiliar Jew approached me suddenly. He was one of the thousands of forced laborers in the camp, and he said to me, 'Jew! Know that tomorrow is Yom Kippur!'"

"I did not know where he had come from and how he had figured out who I was, but his short remark broke my heart to pieces. Suddenly I remembered the past that I had tried to forget for all these years. I felt Jewish emotions rise in my heart, and I decided that this year, I would fast on Yom Kippur, for the first time in my life.

"I remembered that Yom Kippur is a day of *tefillah*, and I tried to remember some passages of *tefillah*. But the only thing I recalled from my childhood was *Modeh Ani* and the *passuk* of *Shema Yisrael*. So I just repeated these two phrases over and over until the end of the fast.

"When that day was over, I was drained, but satisfied. I did not believe that in my poor health, I would be able to give up my daily bread ration, and to fast all the way to the end.

"I am extremely grateful to that Jew for reminding me about Yom Kippur," the older man concluded. "This way I will be able to leave this world as a believing Jew..."

The man concluded his words, and Reb Mendel remembered the question he had thought of on Yom Kippur. Now, it was all clear to him: Indeed, yes, "Vechol Ma'aminim" - even that Jew who for fifty years had cleaved to heretic beliefs, still had a spark of *emunah* in his heart, which waited for the moment ordained from Above. Then it was infused with a spirit of life, and it grew and became a burning flame that illuminated this Jew's heart, and returned him to his Father in heaven.

Seh Labayis - Gishmei Brachah, p. 634