

# Vechol Maaminim

A Weekly Pamphlet From "Bney Emunim"



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## Pischu Shearim

A word from the founder and Nasi of Bney Emunim

The cemetery in the town of Sic (Szek) welcomed us in silence. The ancient headstones peek put from the green moss grass. We arrived there on that morning as part of a trip to Romania to visit our roots, to visit the *kever* of the grandfather whose name I bear, Rav Yaakov Dov Marmurstein, *zt"l*, whose 93<sup>rd</sup> *yahrtzeit* falls on this Shabbos, *Parashas Achrei Mos*.

I approached the *matzeivah* and began to read the letters, but nothing could have prepared me for the surprise. “פה תידום עין” I read on the headstone, “*Ish tam veyashar tzaddik tamim, yerei Hashem kol yamav, Moreinu Harav Yaakov Dov ben Baila, talmid muvhak l'haGaon Moreinu Harav Yehuda Assad. Meis biyemei ziknuso, mispar yamav א“צ shanim.*”

I felt a shiver of emotion. “91 years...”! There’s no need to explain the significance of the number 91 to anyone who has crossed the threshold into the world of answering amen. Amen is numerically equivalent to 91. א“צ is also the acronym of אמן – the number of amens that a Jew needs to answer each day. Amen and 91 are one and the same.

In the next line, I read the date when my grandfather passed away, on 26 Nissan 5691, and again I was deeply moved to find another 91 – two on the same *matzeivah*, exactly like the numerical value of his name, as *יעקב* is twice 91, or twice amen.

There is no happenstance in the world. The family at the time certainly did not make the effort to note the fact that my grandfather passed away at age 91 for no reason. It’s relatively unusual to write the age of a person on his *matzeivah*. There is only one explanation, and that is that my grandfather Rav Yaakov Dov was careful about answering amen, and his children found a modest and clever way to allude to this on his *matzeivah* for posterity.

Suddenly, in one moment, it all crystallized for me: I realized where my father, Rav Chaim Bentzion, *zt"l*, the grandson of Rav Yaakov Dov, had drawn the special awe that he had for answering amen, and his strict adherence to answer amen after the *Birchos Hashachar* that me and my brothers said each and every day. By doing so, he imbued in us from an early age the importance of amen.

He received this from his grandfather, Rav Yaakov Dov, *zt"l*, under whom he grew up, who had surely learned to be strict to answer amen from his *rebbe muvhak*, Harav Yehuda Assad, a *talmid* of Harav Mordechai Banet, about whom his son, Rav Yaakov Banet wrote (*Toldos Rabbi Mordechai* [Ofen 592] p. 18):

“He was always...one of the first ten people, and he heard *Birchos Hashachar* from each and every one of those who came to his house in order to answer amen after them, and then he himself said the *brachos* in order, in a pleasant voice, with

*kavanah*, before the *shaliach tzibbur* began the *tefillah*.”

“Zeide,” I stood in front of the *matzeivah* with wet eyes, “I am your grandson, Yaakov Dov, who has *baruch Hashem* merited to establish Bney Emunim to strengthen the answering of amen in Klal Yisrael. Zeide, your tradition has been passed down from generation to generation. Your caution and *hiddur* in answering amen that you imbued in your children and grandchildren, has now become the lot of the entire Jewish world, and it’s all in your merit.”

But that was not the only thing I understood at that moment.

The *Mishnah* in *Maseches Kiddushin* (39b) says: “Anyone who does one mitzvah receives goodness and has his days and years lengthened and he inherits the land.” The *Yerushalmi* (ibid 19) explains that the *Mishnah* is referring to a person who “took one mitzvah and made it special to him and never transgressed it in his life.” This refers to someone who took upon himself to fulfill one mitzvah in every situation, without failing to do it ever. Because he is *moser nefesh* for the mitzvah, he merits that as a result, he is given goodness, his days are lengthened and he inherits the land.

The *Netziv* (*Devarim* 6:1) adds that one who takes upon himself extra caution in one of the *mitzvos* will also gain a benefit in the *chinuch* of his children because “they will also learn to be invested in a certain mitzvah, when they see it from their father.”

These two things were present with my grandfather: In the merit of him being strict to answer amen, about which *Chazal* promised (*Brachos* 47a) the merit to “have his days and years lengthened,” my great grandfather Rav Yaakov Dov merited to live a long life of 91 years, equivalent to amen, which at the time was considered to be a ripe old age.

The second part of the *Netziv*’s words also came true *b’chessed Hashem*, on a practical level, because as I noted, I learned to be cautious about answering amen – and am so invested in this lofty subject, *baruch Hashem* – from his grandson, my father Rav Chaim Bentzion, *zt"l* – who, as the *Yerushalmi* says “made this mitzvah special for himself and never transgressed it all his days.”

May these words be in memory of my great grandfather Rav Yaakov Dov, whose *yahrtzeit* is this Shabbos. And I call upon you, dear readers: Choose to be strict about answering amen. Recite *Birchos Hashachar bechavrusa* every single day. It’s a mitzvah that, on the one hand, is easy and simple to carry out, and on the other hand, the children and grandchildren will notice it, and it will penetrate their soul. By doing so you will merit, *b’ezras Hashem*, that the flame of pure *emunah* will burn in your children forever.

Good Shabbos  
Yaakov Dov Marmurstein



The *matzeivah* of Rav Yaakov Dov Marmurstein, *zt"l*, in the town of Sic (Szek), Romania.

This story took place about twenty years ago. At the time, Reb Aharon Eisenstein, not yet Torah observant, had taken a diving course, and engaged in diving as a relaxing hobby.

On the occasion of this story, Aharon had traveled with a friend to the Tiran Straits in the Sinai Peninsula, to the coast of the Red Sea, which he had heard was an exceptionally beautiful diving site. Getting there was a big deal, but the effort was worth it. At the depths of the sea, which is only penetrated by a few rays of the sun that lend it a mysterious bluish tinge, Aharon and his friend enjoyed every minute. They took photos next to huge sharks, and studied rare fish from close up, as they floated among the magnificent coral reefs.

Aharon and his friend had equipped themselves with an oxygen tank that would provide them with enough oxygen for about half an hour under the water. When the indicator dial showed them that they had just eight minutes of oxygen remaining, they began to head for the surface. But



as they were on the way up, Aharon noticed an opening in one of the rocks to one side of him, which seemed to invite him to peek inside...

Aharon left his friend for a moment, and when he peeked through the opening, he was surprised to discover that there was an enchanting cave, which was open on both ends. On the spur of the moment, he decided to swim into the cave. It was about ten meters long, which an experienced diver could cover in less than a minute, and Aharon entered through the opening with the intention of coming out on the other side.

As he was swimming through, Aharon noticed the amazing creations that dwelled in the cave, including

sea urchins, corals, oysters, and other colorful little fish that swam rapidly from one side of the cave to the other.

Aharon swam quickly to the other side, but just before he exited, his breath caught in fright. On the edge of the cave, just near the exit opening, was a huge fish, called a Gulf torpedo, which belongs to the electric ray family. Its fins were spread wide open across the entire width of the cave in a way that didn't allow passage without touching it.

This is the place to explain that this fish is one of the Torpedinidae family, which includes 22 species of electric rays or torpedoes, flat cartilaginous fishes that produce electricity as a defense and feeding mechanism. They are slow-moving bottom-dwellers. Hashem gave the ability to administer an electric shock to their prey, and those shocks can be as strong as six hundred watts, if not more. The Gulf torpedo is one of the more lethal fish in this family, and touching it could be very dangerous.

Aharon felt panicked and helpless. He tried to go back where he had come from, but the cumbersome diving equipment made it difficult to swim backwards in the narrow cavity of the cave.

Like Bnei Yisrael when standing on the banks of the Yam Suf, without the ability to move forward or backward, Aharon was now in the depths of the Red Sea, with danger on all sides. He was gripped

by paralyzing fear, deathly fear. At the time, the oxygen tank had enough air for just four more minutes. The thought that he was going to end his life here, in this cave, where it was doubtful his body would ever be found, shook him to the core, and awakened deeply buried memories.

In this desperate moment, Aharon realized that *tefillah* was the only thing that could save him. But because he had not had an observant upbringing, he didn't know how to daven. He feverishly wracked his memory, and he suddenly had a dim memory of his childhood. It was one of the few times that he had accompanied his grandfather to daven n shul. As a child, he had looked curiously at the large *heichal*, and his gaze had

lingered on the illuminated sign over the *chazzan's amud* bearing the words: "*Shivisi Hashem lenegdi samid.*" Now these words lit up in front of his eyes, and the cry seemed to emerge from the deepest part of his soul:

"*Shivisi Hashem lenegdi samid!*" Aharon cried silently. "Hashem! I know that You are here with me, I am sure that You know the danger I am in, and I believe that You can get me out of here in one minute..."

Aharon prayed from the depths of his broken heart, and the unbelievable happened. Suddenly, the Gulf torpedo decided to move from the entrance of the cave, and the passage became clear. Aharon quickly swam forward and out of the cave.

When he emerged, Aharon glanced at the oxygen gauge, and was horrified to see that there were only thirty seconds of air remaining. That was too short of a time to rise forty meters to the surface. Again, he was in serious danger, and Aharon repeated the holy words. Suddenly, he was stunned when his lost friend appeared at his side. He quickly signaled that his oxygen was running out, but unfortunately, his friend's oxygen situation was the same. They communicated with hand motions, and decided to unite on their way up to the surface. Each one, at his turn, would take two breaths from the remaining tank.

The skilled friends operated according to emergency directions, in order to conserve energy that would require additional oxygen. They advanced relatively slowly, and from time to time, they took two breaths from the emptying tank. Towards the end, they had to just hold their breaths, but *bechasdei Shamayim*, they reached the surface healthy, safe and so very grateful...

Only after they were on firm ground was Aharon able to release his tears. Only now could he release a sigh of relief and offer his emotional gratitude to the Creator Whom he had rediscovered in the depths of the sea, for giving him his life as a gift, and for unearthing the treasure of *emunah* that had been so deeply buried in his heart.

Now, after the *tefillah* had opened a miraculous path to spare his life, his path to *emunah* was also opened, and that opening later helped him totally transform his life.



### The Tzaddik Was Held Accountable for Not Protecting His Generation

“וידבר ה' אל משה אחרי מות שני בני אהרן בקרבם לפני ה' וימתו” (טז א)

Chazal say (*Vayikra Rabbah* 10 5) that initially, all four of Aharon's sons were supposed to die because of Aharon's role in the *cheit ha'eigel*. But Moshe davened for them, and his *tefillah* was effective in saving half of them, Elazar and Isamar.

Harav Chaim Vital explains that HaKadosh Baruch Hu was angry at Moshe for not davening again that the decree be nullified from Nadav and Avihu as well, even though he saw that his *tefillah* had been partially accepted. Therefore, the *passuk* uses the term “*Vayedaber*” regarding their passing, which is a harsher language (*Makkos* 11a).

As proof of the fact that the *tzaddik* bears responsibility for those in his generation, and he is then held accountable for not protecting them with his *tefillah*, Harav Chaim Vital cites the *Gemara* (ibid) that when a person was killed near the home of Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi, Eliyahu Hanavi did not speak with him for three days.

Eitz Hada'as Tov

### The Tefillah of the Tzaddik Protects Am Yisrael

“וידבר ה' אל משה אחרי מות שני בני אהרן בקרבם לפני ה' וימתו” (טז א)

From the fact that the Torah mentions the death of Aharon's sons at the beginning of the *parashah* that

speaks about the *avodah* of Yom Kippur, Chazal learn (*Yerushalmi Yoma* 1 1): “That just like Yom Kippur atones for Am Yisrael, so, too, the death of *tzaddikim* atones for Am Yisrael.”

But Harav Chizkiyah Feivel Plaut, the Rav of Shuran, added that there is a condition: Just like Yom Kippur atones only for those who repent, the death of *tzaddikim* atones only for those who repent. As Chazal say (*Sanhedrin* 37a) after the passing of Rav Zeira, the Biryonim who lived in his neighborhood said: Until now, we sinned and Rav Zeira would ask for mercy for us in his *tefillah* that we should not be punished. But now, if we continue to sin, who will ask for mercy for us?! And upon this thought, they did complete *teshuvah*.

Likutei Chever Ben Chaim Vol. II p. 88

### The Torah and Mitzvos Are Our Lives

“ושמרתם את חקתי ואת משפטי אשר יעשה אתם האדם והי בהם אני ה'” (יח ה)

The Chiddushei HaRim explained:

A person must keep Torah and *mitzvos* in a way that he should feel that his very life depends on Torah learning and performing *mitzvos*, as we say in the *tefillah* of Arvis: “*Ki heim chayeinu v'orech yameinu*.”

And because all of our life depends only on Torah and fulfilling its *mitzvos*, we say each morning, after *Birchos HaTorah*, the *brachah* of Elokai Neshamah, which was instituted in order to thank Hashem for returning our souls to us each morning.

Siach Sarfei Kodesh Vol. III, 57

## Taaneh Emunim

### Pearls on the Mitzvah of Tefillah

### In Each Generation, a Mashiach Learns Among the Children

“אל תגעו במשיחי ובבניא אל תרעו”

According to the simple meaning, the *passuk* is referring to our ancestors, Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov - that Hashem did not allow the residents of the Land to touch them. The Radak explains (*Divrei Hayamim* I 16:22) that the Avos are called *meshichai* because they were as important and respected as kings that are anointed (*mashu'ach*) with oil. But Chazal explain (*Shabbos* 119b) that the word “*meshichai*” refers to the *tinnokos shel bais rabban*, the children, and the *passuk* warns not to touch them, because it is in the merit of the breath of their mouths that the world is sustained.

Rashi (ibid ad loc. *Bimeshichai*) explains why these children are called *meshichai*. It is because they would often anoint the children with oil. But Rav Yoshiyahu Pinto, in the commentary of the *Rifon Ein Yaakov* (ibid) explains that the *tinnokos shel beis rabban* are called “*meshichai*” from the term שפתיים, that because they do not properly understand what they are learning, all they have is the movement of their lips.

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### — Hodu —

In the times of Harav Chaim Soloveichik, a number of residents of Brisk wanted to institute changes in the learning in the *cheder* in the town. When they presented their plans to the Rav, he replied:

The early sages revealed to us that in every generation, a person who is worthy of being Mashiach is born, and if his generation merits, then he is revealed, and if not, he is not revealed. We can derive from this that in every generation, in one of the *talmudei Torah*, there is a child walking together with his friends and peers, and he may be revealed as Mashaich. In a “fixed” *cheder* like you are suggestion, Mashiach cannot learn! Therefore, I firmly oppose your plans.

Harav Chaim then wittily explained based on this the reason why the *passuk* calls the children “*meshichai*”: Because in each generation there is among these *tashb"ar* someone who is worthy of being *mashiach*, the *passuk* warns “*al tigu bemeshichai*” – do not touch the way of *chinuch* of the *tashb"ar*! Because in order for Mashiach to be able to grow among the walls of the Talmud Torah, he has to do everything *al taharas hakodesh*, without any foreign intervention or influence, even one that according to halachah does not seem to have any problem. (*Harav MiBrisk*, Vol. I, p. 239)

## The Vavei Ha'amudim

28 Nissan 5420

Harav Shabsai Sheftel Halevi Horowitz was born to his father, Rav Yeshayah Halevi, the Shelah Hakadosh. He learned under his father and the Kli Yakar, who at the time were serving together as the Rabbanim of Prague.

In 5382, when his father moved to Eretz Yisrael, he was appointed *moreh tzeddek* and *maggid meisharim* in Prague. In 5388, he was appointed Rav of Furth, and later Rav of Frankfurt; in 5403, he became the Rav of Posen. Wherever he served as Rav, Rav Sheftel had a yeshiva and taught many students.

After the pain and destruction that struck Am Yisrael during the riots of Tach Vetat, many women were bound as *agunos*, and Rav Sheftel was very involved in trying to release them. Due to the events of the time, he had to flee from Posen, and in 5414, he was appointed Av Bais Din in Vienna, which in his times, became a large Jewish center.

Rav Sheftel authored his *sefer Vavei Ha'amudim*, which contains chapters of *mussar* on the six pillars of the world listed in *Pirkei Avos* (1:2; 1:8): Torah, *avodah*, *gemilus*

*chassadim*, *emes*, *din* and *shalom*. He printed his *sefer* at the end of his father's *Shnei Luchos Habris*. Many compilations that he wrote, including on *halachah*, *masechtos* in *Shas* and on Torah remained in manuscript form.

He passed away on Friday 28 Nissan, 5420, and was buried in the ancient Jewish cemetery in the Viennese suburb of Rossau.

*Caption: A photo of the fish monument in the old cemetery in Vienna, near the kever of Harav Sheftel Horowitz, the Vavei Ha'amudim. The story has it that one of the residents of Vienna bought a fish for Shabbos, and before it was killed to prepare it for eating, the fish suddenly opened its mouth and shouted: "Shema Yisrael Hashem Elokeinu Hashem Echad." The person came to Rav Sheftel, who was serving as Av Bais Din at the time, and asked him what to do. The Rav instructed him to bury the fish in the Jewish cemetery. The man heeded the Rav's ruling, and even erected a fish-shaped headstone as an eternal memory. (Adir Bamarom p. 358)*

### When One Is Lax About Amen, His Tefillos Are Not Heard

In his *sefer*, *Vavei Ha'amudim* (*Amud Ha'avodah* Ch. 10:34), Rav Shabsai Sheftel Horowitz wrote that someone who says *tefillos* and other requests during *Chazaras Hashatz* instead of listening to the *brachos* and answering amen to the *chazzan*, not only will his *tefillos* said at that time not be answered, he also loses what he achieved in the whispered *tefillah* that he davened with the *tzibbur*. He writes:

"I often protest about this to those people who daven all kinds of *techinos* and *bakashos* while the *shaliach tzibbur* is repeating the *Shemoneh Esreh*. Because surely what they ask then will not be given to them, and what they do have will be taken from them. I want to say that it is agreed by all the *poskim* that when a *shaliach tzibbur* repeats the *Shemoneh Esreh*, the *tzibbur* should be quiet and answer amen and have *kavanah* on the *brachos* of the *chazzan*. One who is not careful about this will also have what he has in hand taken away, and what he asked the rest of the time is not given to him."

### Tefillah That Comes Through a Sin

The words of the *Vavei Ha'amudim* seem to need explanation: It is

understood that the *tefillah* that a person davens during *Chazaras Hashatz* instead of answering amen isn't answered. This is because a *tefillah* said in a prohibited way is like a "*mitzvah haba'ah b'aveirah*," and one is not *yotzei* the obligation of the *mitzvah*. As *sefer Orchos Yosher* (*Tefillah*, *Ketzas Dinei Tefillah* 28) writes: "One must not speak during the *Chazaras Hashatz*, even to say prayers of supplication or to learn (*Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim* 124:17). And one who learns or reads the *parashah* during *Chazaras Hashatz* or *Kaddish*, not only will not receive a reward, he will also receive a punishment for this...And Torah like this cannot succeed (see *Bamidbar Rabbah* 22:7) ...And it is possible that even *bedieved* he was not *yotzei* the *Shnayim Mikra*, because it is a *mitzvah haba'ah b'aveirah*."

But what he says that one who davens in the middle of *Chazaras Hashatz* loses even what he achieved in the *tefillah* that he did daven properly, is a new *din* that needs explanation. Can it be that because he does not answer amen after the *shatz* he should lose also what he attained in the whispered *Shemoneh Esreh*?

### The Whispered Tefillah Depends on Answering Amen

*Sefer Inyano Shel Yom* (Moadim

Ch. 31) explained according to a *chiddush* of the *Eretz Tzvi* (22) the reason that the *takanah* of *Chazal* that the *shatz* should repeat the *tefillah* is practiced today as well, even though there is no one who is *yotzei* his obligation of *tefillah* this way. This is because there is another reason for this *takanah*: completing the amen to the *brachos* of *tefillah*. The *Rema* rules (*Orach Chaim* 167 2) that answering amen after the *brachah* is part of the *brachah*, and therefore, the *mevarech* should have in mind to be *yotzei* his obligation to answer amen from the *oneh amen* after his *brachah*. In order to complete the *brachos* of *tefillah* recited in a whisper with amen, it was instituted that the *shatz* should repeat the *tefillah* and amen should be answered after his *brachos*.

Now we can explain that the *Vavei Ha'amudim* holds that the *brachos* of the whispered *tefillah* are completed by answering amen after *Chazaras Hashatz*, and are considered one *tefillah*. Therefore, even someone who had *kavanah* properly in the *tefillah* of the quiet *Shemoneh Esreh*, his *tefillah* is only complete if he answers amen to *Chazaras Hashatz*, and if he does not, he loses even that whispered *tefillah*.