

Ve chol Maaminim

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Pamphlet
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Pischu Shearim

A word from the founder and Nasi of Bney Emunim

In this week's *parashah*, *Parashas Bo*, the Torah describes the redemption of Bnei Yisrael from the bondage of Egypt in the merit of their strong *emunah* in Hashem (*Yalkut Shimoni Hoshea remez* 119). The *korban Pesach* is also described in this *parashah*, and Am Yisrael were commanded to sacrifice it before they departed from Egypt. This, too, was intended to establish the absolute *emunah* in Hashem's Leadership in their hearts (see *Ramban Shemos* 13:2).

Yetzias Mitzrayim also included a spiritual redemption. At the time, Am Yisrael emerged from 49 levels of impurity, was chosen as the Am Segulah, and merited to receive the Torah.

If Am Yisrael merited spiritual and physical redemption in the merit of *emunah*, then undoubtedly this *zechus* can also advocate for us in these days, and we can be redeemed physically and spiritually, if we just merit to build genuine *emunah* in Hashem inside ourselves.

As we know, answering amen is a basic foundation in the building of *emunah* in the heart of a person, and therefore, being scornful of it, or lax about it, means being lax in *emunah*, *chalilah*.

The Alter of Slabodka, Rav Nosson Tzvi Finkel, *ztz"l*, in one of his *shmuessen*, posed a question to his *talmidim*: "Why do Chazal speak so extensively about the severity of the punishment of someone who does not answer amen *k'halachah*?" But he immediately clarified that "this question is mistaken in its very essence," because "it stems from the fact that people do not understand that a flaw in answering amen is a flaw in *emunah*!" (*Sichos HaSaba MiSlabodka* Vol. I, p. 245)

Perhaps for this reason, answering amen is alluded in the name of this *parashah*, the *parashah* of *emunah*. Because בא is an acronym for ברכה and אמן and it is also the acronym for בני אמונים, the term that Am Yisrael have merited because they are a "goy tzaddik shomer emunim."

If we are talking about a spiritual redemption, this is the place to point out that answering amen has tremendous power to arouse the soul of a Yid and

to elevate it upwards. I have encountered people whose entire *tefillah* changed drastically because of answering amen. For example, Rabbi A. shares in a letter that Bney Emunim received, and it is one letter of many similar ones: "I was never one of the big daveners...For years, I spent my davening half asleep, mentally, on automatic, just saying the words. Of course I davened, but the expression 'like a body without a soul' seemed to be written precisely to describe the dryness of my *tefillos*.

"There was no reason that I should not continue this way until the age of eighty, if not for the fact that I was introduced, through you, to the importance of answering amen with *kavanah*, in quantity and in quality. One morning, I decided to try. I went over to my neighbor in shul and suggested that we recite *Birchos Hashachar bechavrusa*. The whole thing took just a few minutes.

"That same morning, without me knowing, a small seed was planted in me...After a few days, it sprouted. Something in my soul began to awaken, to become more aware. This small, three-letter word began to take action, and to percolate.

"I will not tire you with the details, but suffice it to say that within a short time, my *tefillos* were transformed to a lofty spiritual experience. And if you think it ended with *tefillah*, you are mistaken... This elevation, this powerful connection with my Father in Heaven, accompany me throughout the day, from morning to night."

Rabbi A.'s letter concludes with a remarkable declaration: "I've become a different person; I've become an 'Amen Yid'!"

And so, we issue the call to every Yid: If you have not yet joined those who say *Birchos Hashachar bechavrusa*, start today, and you can also merit to be an 'Amen Yid.'

Good Shabbos

Yaakov Dov Marmurstein

This wondrous story was related by the Birchas Avraham of Slonim, *ztz"l*, in one of his *drashos* about the great virtue of answering amen:

Rav Shimon the Dayan was a holy person, and all the Jews of Vilna were in awe of him. He utilized every minute of his day, whether learning Torah diligently, or in his work as a *dayan*, to which he was extremely dedicated. But despite his many affairs, Rav Shimon the Dayan had a special practice, that he was very strict to adhere to each and every day: He would go to the various shuls and *batei medrash* in the city and urge people to answer amen aloud and with *kavanah*. Even on boiling hot days, or on freezing, icy days, one could see Rav Shimon dashing from one place to the next, from one shul to another, urging the *mispallelim* not to be lax about this lofty mitzvah.



Rav Moshe Horowitz *ztz"l*

A *gadol hador* once came to visit in Vilna. When he heard about the *dayan's* practice, he sought to understand the reason for it. When he visited Rav Shimon's home, he asked him about it.

Out of *kavod haTorah*, Rav Shimon agreed to share with his distinguished guest the secret behind this special practice of arousing the *tzibbur* to answer amen. He recounted:

The story happened one day when the *beis din* was closed. For this reason, I was able to sit in my house and learn, as I always want to do. I was sitting at my table, with a *Maseches Shabbos* in front of me. For many hours, I delved into the Torah of the Tannaim and Amoraim. The hours passed without me noticing, because I was so engrossed in my learning and

thoroughly enjoying it. I don't know how it happened, but suddenly I fell into a deep sleep, and my head slumped down. In my dream, I saw a person with a venerable appearance, whose face emitted a glow that is preserved for the higher worlds. He came closer to me, until his hand touched my head, and he asked me: 'Why are you not careful about my words?'

"I was very afraid. I could barely move my lips, when I asked him back: 'Who are you and what are your words?' The man did not answer my question and just said to me: 'I am asking you that from today on, you should go to the shuls and *batei medrash* and warn people to be careful about answering amen, and aside from meriting tremendous reward in Olam Haba, as Reish Lakish says 'Anyone who answers amen with all his strength has the gates of Gan Eden opened for him' (*Shabbos* 119b), they will also be spared from all the terrible decrees that come in this world, and they will merit the blessing of Shamayim in all that they do.'

"When the man finished speaking, he disappeared, and I woke up from my sleep, with my body shaking; I was terrified by this dream that I had had. I was overcome by the revelation I had merited, but I was not sure if it was a dream with no meaning, or a real dream that was serious.

I davened to Hashem to give me a sign, to clarify for me if the dream was true.

Over the time that I davened, my finger remained on the place in the *Gemara*. When I finished davening, I was stunned to see that my finger was pointing to the place of the words of Reish Lakish: 'Anyone who answers amen with all his strength has the gates of Gan Eden opened for him.' My soul was overcome with amazement and excitement. I saw this as a sign from Above.

Since that day, I am *moser nefesh* for this. I go to all the shuls in the city and try to fulfill the words of Reish Lakish, as he asked me, to arouse the *mispallelim* to be careful about answering amen, so that they should merit to have the gates of Gan Eden opened for them, and from there, they will be showered with abundance, *brachah* and Heavenly mercy.

Shiru Lamelech p. 131

Rav Menachem Mendel Lubin, *shlita*, the successor of his father-in-law Rav Nissim Karelitz, *ztz"l*, as Rav and Av

Beis Din of Ramat Aharon and Rosh Kollel Chazon Ish in Bnei Brak, related a wondrous dream that happened in our times.

For many years. Rav Lubin learned *bechavrusa* in Kollel Chazon Ish with a pious and learned *talmid chacham*, Rav Moshe Horowitz, *ztz"l*. In 5758, two days before Shavuos, Rav Horowitz had a severe heart attack, and on Shavuos night, his *neshamah* departed this world.

That year, on Friday night *Parashas Ki Seitzei*, Rav Lubin had a dream. He saw his *chavrusa*, Rav Moshe Horowitz, standing in front of him wearing a *shtrimmel* and his Shabbos clothes. The Rav was stunned at the sight of his beloved friend, and he asked: 'Please tell me what are they strict about in the Beis Din Shel Ma'alah?'

Rav Horowitz replied: "They are strict about answering amen *k'halachah*."

Rav Lubin related that he had a feeling that it was a real dream, because it is cited in the *mekoros* that a person who is in the Olam Ha'emes reveals himself to people in this world wearing Shabbos clothes. Later, when the dream was recounted to Rav Chaim Kanievsky *ztz"l* he affirmed that indeed, it was a real dream.

We merited to hear about this dream from Rebbetzin Kanievsky many years ago, on 13 Elul 5772, about a month before her passing. She related that following the dream, her husband began to be strict to recite *Birchos Hashachar* in front of someone who would answer amen to the *brachos*. So each morning, as long as the Rebbetzin was alive, the Rav would recite *Birchos Hashachar* and the Rebbetzin would respond amen, and then the Rebbetzin would recite the *brachos* and the Rav would answer amen.

When Rav Aharon Leib Steinman, *ztz"l*, heard about this dream, he also decided that at the *neitz minyan* that took place in his house, the *mispallelim* would make sure to be there fifteen minutes before davening so that all of them – the Rosh Yeshivah included – could say the *brachos bechavrusa* for one another.

Because of that dream, two Torah giants began to recite *Birchos Hashachar bechavrusa* – how remarkable!

The Tefillah of the Leaders of Am Yisrael

"ויאמר ה' אל משה ואל אהרן בארץ מצרים לאמר: החדש הזה לכם ראש חדשים ראשון הוא לכם לחדשי השנה" (יב א-ב)

Rav Moshe Leib Litsch Rosenbaum of Pressburg explained:

When saying "*hachodesh hazeh lachem*" HaKadosh Baruch Hu alluded to Moshe and Aharon about the fitting way for them, the leaders of Am Yisrael, to pray for their flock. "*Hachodesh hazeh*" – with all its events, should be "*lachem*" the leaders of the nation "*rosh chodashim*" – an example and a symbol for all the events that will be *nischadesh* and will follow as a result of the sins of Am Yisrael. Meaning that even if Am Yisrael will sin extensively, they should take heart that just like the redemption of Am Yisrael from Mitzrayim took place despite them being mired in the 49 levels of impurity, likewise, there is nothing blocking Hashem from forgiving their sins, and therefore, they should not give up on davening for them.

Indeed, after the *cheit ha'eigel*, Moshe asked (*Shemos* 32:11): "*Lamah Hashem yechereh Apcha b'amcha asher hotzeisa mei'Eretz Mitzrayim*" – meaning, if you redeemed them from Mitzrayim even when they were mired in the 49 levels of impurity, why are You not *ma'avir al middosecha* to forgive them for this sin as well?

Imros Hashem, Vayikra 3:4

Darkness – Lack of Light or a Creation in its Own Right

"ויאמר ה' אל משה נטה ירך על השמים ויהי חשך על ארץ מצרים וימש חשך" (יב א)

The Ramban (later, in *passuk* 23, and see previously, 4:11) explains that even though darkness is not a creation in its own right, but rather a situation that exists due to a lack of light, the darkness with which Egypt was struck was a special creation: A thick cloud descended from the Heavens, enveloped the Egyptians and completely blocked any light from reaching them. This is what Chazal refer to (*Shemos Rabbah* 14:1) when they say that the word *וימש* here is from the term *מישוש* to feel or touch, meaning that it was tangible darkness "thick like a dinar" which could be touched.

But the Gra disagrees and holds that darkness in general is an actual creation in its own right, and is not just a condition of a lack of light, as is evident from the words of the *passuk* (*Yeshayahu* 45:7): "*yotzer ohr uborei choshech*." And when we see that light repels darkness it is because HaKadosh Baruch Hu limited the power of the darkness and determined that it should be repelled by light. In *Makkas Choshech*, according to the Gra, Hashem removed this limitation from the darkness, and the light did not have the power to repel it, and on the contrary, the darkness is what repelled the light. Based on this, "*vayamash*" here is explained like (*Shemos* 23:22) "*מיש*" – which means "*yassur*", that the darkness with which the Egyptians would be struck would have the power to overcome the light and to remove it.

Rav Shmuel Yitzchak Hillman, the Raavad of London,

wrote that based on the words of the Gra, we can clearly understand the words of the *brachah* of *Hama'ariv Aravim*: "*Gollel ohr mipnei choshech vechoshech mipnei ohr*." Because the light and the darkness are equal creations, therefore, just like Hashem spreads out the "light in front of the darkness" each day, likewise, He also spread the "darkness in the face of the light" and if not for the decree of Hashem, the light would not have been able to repel the darkness.

Rav Yitzchak Zev Soloveitchik of Brisk explained based on the Gra the words of the *piyut* in *Haggadah Shel Pesach*: "*Karev yom asher hu lo yom velo laylah, ram hoda ki Lecha hayom af Lechah halaylah*." During the time of Mashiach, when there will be an essence of "neither day nor night" then it will be known that "*af Lecha halaylah*" – that even the darkness is a Divine creation just like the light. Because if not, and the darkness is merely a lack of light, how can there be a reality of "neither day nor night" – because isn't it the case that in a lack of light there must be darkness?

Kol Eliyahu; Ohr Hayashar Tamid 32a; Haggadah Shel Pesach MiBeis Levi, p. 244

Gratitude for Hidden Miracles

"ואמרתם זבח פסח הוא לה' אשר פסח על בתי בני ישראל במצרים בנגפו את מצרים ואת בתינו הציל ויקד העם וישתחוו" (יב ב)

Rashi explains that Bnei Yisrael bowed to Hashem "for the news of the *geulah* and the arrival to the Land and the news of the children that they would have." Rav Chaim Dov Altusky, one of the *roshei yeshivah* of Torah Ore, explained:

The nature of a person is that he does not recognize hidden miracles that occur to him every single minute with *Hashgachah pratis*, even though they are sometimes even more wondrous and powerful than the open miracles. But when they left Mitzrayim, amidst the open Miracles that Hashem performed for them, Am Yisrael awakened to recognize the hidden miracles, such as the birth of children, and to thank for those miracles as well. Therefore, when they offered thanks for the great miracles that Hashem was destined to do with them" the news of the redemption and of their arrival to the Land," they also included their gratitude for the "news of the children."

The Mashgiach Rav Zeidel Epstein related a story from the time he was learning in Mirrer Yeshivah:

One of the *bochurim* was once stricken with a blockage in his intestine, and he needed to be transported urgently to Warsaw, the capital, to have an operation. Some time after his trip, a telegram with two words came to the yeshivah: 'surgery successful.' His friends were overjoyed. When the Mashgiach, Rav Yeruchem Levovitz, heard this, he said: If we would understand the depth of the miracle that is done for us each day when our bodily systems function normally, then each *brachah* of *Asher Yatzar* would be said with tremendous joy and emotion, no less than the way you just felt when you saw that telegram that was sent from Warsaw with news of the successful surgery...

Chiddusehi Basra Mikra p. 14 [printed at the end of Chiddushei Basra, Brachos]; Kovetz Bais Hillel 20, p. 116

Razei Emunim

Allusions to Amen in the Parashah

Amen Spares from the Darkness of Gehinnom

”ויש משה את ידו על השמים ויהי חשך אפלה בכל ארץ מצרים שלשת ימים” (י כב)

The holy Zohar (*Vayeilech* 286a) says very awesome things about the great punishment of one who is lax about answering amen. After describing the lowest level in Gehinnom, of which Shlomo Hamelech says (*Mishlei* 15:11): "*She'ol v'avadon negged Hashem*," the Zohar writes: "To that place [the lowest level in Gehinnom that is called '*she'ol v'avadon*') descend the people who are scornful about answering amen, and they are judged in Gehinnom for the many amens that were lost to them because they did not hold them in importance"

(and see *Rabbeinu Bechayei Shemos* 14 1).

Rav Chaim Vital added: The first letter of the word amen is aleph. The letters of אל"ף can also spell אפל – darkness, meaning: double darkness like the darkness in Mitzrayim (see Rashi here). To teach us that one who is lax about answering amen will ultimately be sentenced to the seventh level of Gehinnom, from where the darkness in Egypt was drawn. (*Pri Eitz Chaim, Sha'ar Kavanas Amen* 3)

Based on this, the Rebbe Rav Meir of Dzhikov explained the words brought after *Makkas Choshech* (11:8): "צא צא – "…אתה וכל העם. is numerically equivalent to אמן to allude that one who is careful to answer amen properly

will be spared from the darkness and the *afeilah* that one who is lax about amen is subject to. (*Imrei Noam*)

This is the place to bring the words of the *mekubal*, Rav Meir Schwartz of Podhajce. After he copied in his will the words of the Zohar above, he went on to warn his descendants: "My dear children, believe, that when I saw this in the holy Zohar here, and in the Zohar Chadash as well, my hairs stood on end. Woe to me and woe to my soul how many times I lost out on a few amens. Therefore, '*lema'an Hashem! Lema'an Hashem!* Be very, very careful to hear every *brachah* from the *mevarech* in order to know which way to say amen properly. (*Hanhagos Tzaddikim* Vol. V, p. 445)

Shaarei Gan Eden

Amen and Brachos in the Teachings of a Baal Hayahrtzeit



The beis medrash of the Sfas Emes in the town of Gur, Poland

The Sfas Emes 5 Shevat 5665

Rav Yehudah Aryeh Leib Alter was born in 5607 in Warsaw to his father, Rav Avraham Mordechai, the oldest son of the Chiddushei HaRim of Gur.

When he was two years old, he was orphaned of his mother, and when he was nine, his eminent father passed away as well. He was raised by his grandfather, the Chiddushei HaRim. His *chinuch* in his grandfather's home left a deep impression

on him, and from his youth, he dedicated all his time to Torah and *avodas Hashem*.

He was twelve years old when the Kotzker Rebbe passed away and his grandfather began to lead the community. Then, as well, he was always at his grandfather's side, as they learned together for many hours, both *Nigleh* and *Nistar*.

With the passing of his grandfather in 5626, he was appointed to take his place as Rav in the town of Gur, at the young age of nineteen. About four years later, with the passing of the Rebbe Rav Chanoch Henich of Aleksander, thousands of *chassidim* turned their eyes to him, and after much urging, he acceded to lead them. Again, the roads leading to Gur were very busy, as tens of thousands gathered to be in his presence.

In 5664 the Russo-Japanese war broke out, and thousands of his *chassidim* were forcibly conscripted to the army. During that time, the Rebbe did not get into a bed. He slept on the floor, laying only on his robe. This robe was saturated with his tears each morning.

The Sfas Emes was Rebbe for nearly thirty-five years. On 5 Shevat 5665, at the age of just 58, he passed away, and was buried beside his grandfather's *kever* in the cemetery in Gur. After his passing, his *divrei Torah* on Torah and Shas were printed in the renowned series of *seforim* entitled *Sfas Emes*.

Regarding the words of Chazal that "the oneh amen is greater than the mevarech,"

many of the early sages have already asked: Isn't the *mevarech* the initiator and the one who does the deed, while the *oneh amen* merely joins him? Why then is he greater than the *mevarech*?

The Sfas Emes explains this in two ways:

1. The *brachah* is limited in accordance with his understanding and the broadness of the knowledge of the *mevarech* about the greatness of Hashem. But the *oneh amen*, who is drawn after the *brachah* of his friend, with *emunah peshutah*, has no limitation, because *emunah* is not contingent on understanding and perception, and it is has been perpetuated in all its strength in all generations. Therefore, *Chazal* say that the *oneh amen* is greater than the *mevarech*. (*Ki Savo* 5641, based on *Birchas Eliyahu* p. 126)

2. In this world we cannot do the act of a mitzvah with the requisite *shleimus*, and only the *ratzon* in the heart of a person to do the mitzvah can be pure and complete. Therefore, while the *mevarech* cannot say the *brachah* with *shleimus*, answering amen, which is not a deed in its own right, but rather expresses agreement and desire to join the words of the *mevarech*, can be done with *shleimus*, and therefore, the level of the *oneh amen* is greater than the *mevarech*. (*Ki Savo* 5638)