

Vechele Maaminim

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Peninei Emunim

Pearls of Tefillah in the Parashah

Pischu Shearim

Open the Gates

Bitachon Is the Key to Torah

“וידבר ה' אל משה במדבר סיני באהל מועד באחד להדש השני בשנה השנית לצאתם מארץ מצרים לאמר” (א א)
Chazal explain (*Bamidbar Rabbah* 1 7) on this *passuk* that the Torah was given in three things: in fire, in water and in the desert. And they learn from this: “Just like these are free to all the denizens of the world, so, too, the words of Torah are free.” **Harav Yaakov Neiman**, *rosh yeshivas* Ohr Yisrael, added: The Torah is given specifically in the desert, in order to teach us that *bitachon* is a condition to merit Torah. Just like one who is in the desolate desert, far from any settled place, and without any help, puts all his *bitachon* in Hashem, so, too, a person who wishes to merit the Torah – has to feel like someone who lives in the desert, and to trust only the Creator. This *bitachon* is a vital condition to merit Torah, because just like a person who sits at the table of a wise sage will surely learn from his wisdom, likewise, someone who trusts in Hashem, and is completely reliant on Him, will merit to imbibe from Hashem’s wisdom.

For this reason, in the *brachah* of *Ahavah Rabbah*, in which we ask about the Torah, we stress the matter of *bitachon*: “*Ba'avur avoseinu shebatchu Becha, vatelamdem chukei chaim,*” meaning, our forebears only merited to learn “the laws of life” through having *bitachon* in Hashem.

Darkei Mussar

A Fixed Place in Shul

“וחנו בני ישראל איש על מחנהו ואיש על דגלו לצבאתם” (א נב)

Harav Yaakov Abuchatzaira, the Abir Yaakov, explained:

Chazal attribute great importance to the obligation of setting a place to daven in shul, and they say (*Brachos* 6b): “Anyone who sets a place for his *tefillah*, the G-d of Avraham helps him.” This obligation is alluded to in this *passuk*: “And Bnei Yisrael camped” – during their time of *tefillah*, “each man in his camp” – in the place where the Shechinah was camped, in the *beis knesses*, “and each man on his banner” – in his regular place, as the *degalim* marked for the Shevatim their fixed place in the camp.

Pituchei Chotam

Answering Amen to *Birchas HaTorah*

Yirmiyahu ben Chilkiyahu, the Navi at the time of the Churban Bayis Rishon, revealed in his *nevuah* the reason why Yerushalayim and the Bais Hamikdash were destroyed. He said (*Yirmiyah* 9:11-12): “Who is the man so wise that he can understand this? And who is he to whom the mouth of Hashem has spoken, that he may declare it? Why is the land ruined...And Hashem said: (It is) because they have forsaken My Torah, which I set before them.” Chazal (*Nedarim* 81a) explain that “they have forsaken My Torah” means “that they did not make a *brachah* on the Torah first.”

The importance of this *brachah* is so great that for not reciting it, the Bais Hamikdash was destroyed. Why?! What is the great sin in not reciting *Birchas HaTorah*?!

Aside for the many explanations brought down in the Rishonim and Acharonim, I thought to add an explanation that this *brachah* contains the secret of the power of conveying the Torah to Am Yisrael from one generation to the next. In this *brachah* we have a special request: “And we and our children... and the children of Amcha Bais Yisrael should all know Your Name and learn Your Torah, *lishmah*.” Not saying *Birchas HaTorah* endangers the passing on of the Torah from generation to generation, which is why it is so severe.

Proof of this can be learned from the words of Chazal (*ibid*) that someone who does not recite *Birchas HaTorah* does not merit to have a son who is a *talmid chacham*, because saying *Birchas HaTorah* and conveying the Torah to the next generations are intertwined.

That same “caution” that is needed

A word from the founder and Nasi of Bney Emunim

for this *brachah* also includes the stipulation that the *brachah* needs to be said completely, which means it is especially important for someone to answer it with amen. Because if this *brachah* is so important, one should certainly make sure to recite it in a complete way, and amen is what completes the *brachah*.

All this is aside for the special importance of answering amen to *Birchas HaTorah*. Many of the Rishonim think that it is an obligation from the Torah (see *Mishnah Berurah* beginning of 47), and the *Pri Megadim* wrote (*Orach Chaim* 215, *Mishbetzos Zahav* 2) that, in keeping with their view that reciting the *brachah* is a mitzvah from the Torah, so is answering amen after it a mitzvah from the Torah. In this context it is worth noting what the Rishonim alluded (*Peirush Hatefillos Vehabrachos LeRav Y. Ben Yakar*, Vol. I, p. 112) that amen is an acronym for אז מסיני נצטוו, because as noted the mitzvah of answering amen to the Torah that was given to us at Sinai indeed we got from Sinai.

How symbolic is it that after learning on the eve of Shavuot, in keeping with the *minhag*, many are then *yotzei Birchas HaTorah* by hearing it and answering amen after it, according to *halachah*. And surely this should awaken us to the importance of the mitzvah of answering amen after this *brachah*. May it be that the merit of reciting *Birchas HaTorah* in the complete way should advocate for us to merit children and grandchildren who engage in Torah and *mitzvos*, as we all aspire.

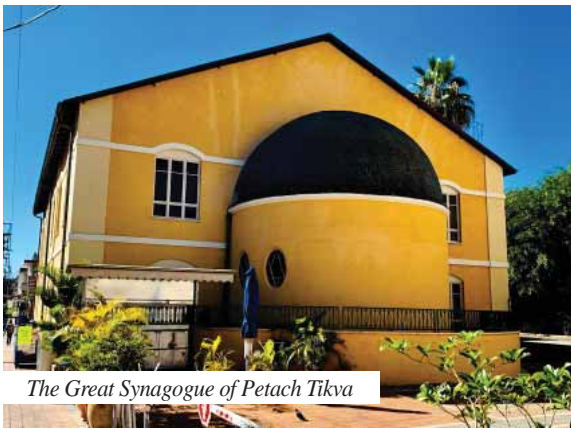
Good Shabbos
Yaakov Dov Marmurstein

Birchas HaTorah After Seventy Years

This story took place in the city of Petach Tikva, during the time that Iron Curtain fell, when many Jews from the Russian exile made Aliyah. One Shabbos, at the beginning of *Nishmas*, an unfamiliar elderly man walked into the shul, leaning on the arm of a younger man who appeared to be his son.

For a time, father and son stood awkwardly at the entrance to the shul, studying the *mispallelim* from head to toe. Only then did they hesitantly make their way inside. The two did not know how to daven, and looked like they also didn't know enough to be ashamed about it... After seventy years of oppression under the Communist regime, the visit in the shul looked to them like an interesting attraction, and little more.

They seemed to have entered by mistake, during a morning walk, but a faint memory that awoke in their hearts caused them to enter, and in the end, even to sit down on one of the empty places and study their surroundings curiously.



The Great Synagogue of Petach Tikva

When it came time for *Shochan Ad*, the *gabbai* sent one of the *mispallelim* to daven from the *amud*. The man had a sweet voice, and he enjoyed singing the *tefillos*, to the enjoyment of the *mispallelim*. As he trilled the words of *Shochan Ad*, tears appeared in the older man's eyes, and he seemed very emotional.

While the son who sat next to him looked around with a frozen stare, the father sat up straighter and straighter in his chair. He followed the *shaliach tzibbur* through the *tefillah*, and felt moved by *K-Adon*, teared at *Kedushah* and stood with everyone when the *Sefer Torah* was taken out of the *aron*. The *baal korei* began to read the

parashah, and in the middle of the reading of *sheini*, they were all stunned to see the elderly visitor stand up and walked purposefully towards the *bimah*. He went over to the *gabbai*, and asked in a Lithuanian accented Yiddish, to be called to the Torah.

The *gabbai* was surprised, but called him up for *shlishi*. Someone offered the visitor his *tallis*, and the man began to make the *brachos*, by heart, in a deep voice with slow pronunciation, filled with emotion: "*Asher bachar banu mikol ha'amim...*" There was utter silence in the shul when the *baal korei* finished the reading, and everyone listened attentively as the older man wept the words "*Vechayei olam nata besocheinu.*"

At the end of the *brachah*, the older man did not leave his place. Instead, he bent his head over the *bimah*, and for a few long moments, wept bitterly. He did not calm down until his son stood up and calmed him, in a few rapid fire sentences in a foreign language.

The elderly man returned to his place, the hubbub died down and the *kriyah* continued.

When the davening came to an end, a few of the people approached the elderly man, still sitting in his place, and asked him who he was, where he had come from, and why he had cried so much at the end of the *brachah*.

In response, the older man quickly drew the listeners into the glory days of Vilna, his native city. The man brought the city alive for his listeners, and described it as one filled with Jews who

were great scholars. In their mind's eye, they could envision the home of the Gra, and not far from it, the convent where the famous Ger Tzeddek was imprisoned. The *batei medrash* were filled with Torah scholars and even with laymen who were great *yirei Shamayim*. There were many *shiurim* delivered by *ga'onim* and *tzaddikim*, as the pious Jews of the city sat and listened, in an effort to acquire more knowledge and advance in their learning.

"A few months before my bar mitzvah," the man related, "I heard my parents speaking to each other about where their life was going. My mother wanted me to continue learning in the

yeshivah, while my father was leaning towards sending me to a different institution.

"My father, who was in favor of liberalism and independence, claimed that my studies at the gymnasium would strengthen my Jewish awareness. In his view, the fact that I would keep *mitzvos* as the only Jew among gentiles would make me a mature Jew with a solid personality and clear worldview.

"My father insisted on registering me for the gymnasium, and a few weeks later, I found myself there, much to his satisfaction. Four months later was the Shabbos when I would turn thirteen. I had studied my *aliyah* for *maftir*, and on Shabbos I was called up to the Torah, accompanied by my father's broad smile and my mother's pelading tears.

When I descended from the *bimah*, as the rest of the *tzibbur* sang, the *gaon* of the generation, HaRav Chaim Ozer Grodzhinski, *zt"l*, stood up, and as he was shaking my father's hand with *mazel tov*, he whispered firmly in his ear, 'Dear father, for your own good and for the good of your son, I want to warn you that if you don't retract, and immediately take your child out of the gymnasium, you can be sure that generations will pass before he has another *aliyah* at the Torah.'

My father listened submissively to the words of the *gadol hador*, but did not change his mind. Today, seventy years later, I can tell you that Rav Chaim Ozer was right. Some time later, influenced by the friends I had in the gymnasium, I abandoned Yiddishkeit, and from that Shabbos to this day, I did not have even one more *aliyah*.

Since we made Aliyah and until now, I've passed by here many times, but only today, without knowing why, was I drawn to come inside. When the *baal korei* began to read, I realized why I was drawn inside: it was the same *kriah* that I read on the Shabbos of my bar mitzvah. Now you tell me, how could I help but become emotional?!"

"Rav Chaim Ozer was right," the older man said sadly, as his eyes fell on his bareheaded son, sitting not far away, listening to his father's words, but not understanding much of what he was saying.

The *mispallelim* dispersed to their homes, and only the older man remained in the shul, explaining to his son in Russian what had happened.

The Halachos of Amen Ketzarah

Answering Amen Slowly

1. One should not say the amen quickly, in a way that answering it resembles one who is answering as a burden; rather it should be said slowly.

Sources and Explanations

The *Rambam* wrote (*Brachos* 1 14) wrote: “Anyone who answers amen should not answer an *amen chatufah* or an *amen ketufah* or an *amen ketzarah* or *aruchah*, but rather an amen in the middle.” The concept of *amen ketzarah* is not mentioned in this *Breisa* (*Brachos* 47a), but many of the *Rishonim* explained in this *Breisa* that in addition to the prohibition to answer *amen chatufah*, *ketufah* and *yesomah*, is also not to answer an *amen ketzarah* (*Seder Rav Amram Gaon*, 83; *Ri”f Brachos* 34b *ibid Midpaei HaRif*; *Rosh Brachos* 7 17, and more), and that is also the version of the *Rambam* (*Ma’aseh Rokeach* *ibid*). In light of this, the *Shulchan Aruch* ruled (124:8): “And one should not answer an *amen ketzarah*, and it should be a bit long.”

From the words of the *Rambam* (*ibid*) “and not an *amen ketzarah* and not an *aruchah*, but rather a middle one,” it seems that an *amen ketzarah* is the opposite of an *amen aruchah*, meaning that he says it quickly and shortens it, as *Rabbeinu Manoach* explained there. But *Rabbeinu Yona* (*ibid* 34b *Midapei HaRif*) thinks that answering amen quickly is already forbidden with *amen chatufah*, which he explains to mean “that he grabs the word and says it quickly.” Therefore, he explained that the *amen ketzarah* is if he misses the letter ‘aleph’ and answers “*mein*”, or he didn’t prolong the pronouncing of the aleph at all.

Rabbeinu Manoach (*ibid*) explains that the drawback of the amen answered quickly is the fact that the *oneh* is displaying derision for the mitzvah, as if it was a heavy burden that he has to hastily be rid of, as the *Mishnah Berurah* wrote (*ibid* 36). But from the words of the *Tur* (*ibid*) who wrote

“he should not hurry to say it without *kavanah*” it seems that the drawback of answering amen quickly is the lack of *kavanah*.

2. Chazal say (*Brachos* 47a) that “anyone who prolongs the amen has his days and years prolonged.” But one should not prolong them too much, because then the meaning of the word is lost.

Sources and Explanations

The *Ben Ish Chai* explained that this is why *Chazal* wrote the double language by saying “His days and years are prolonged.” It is because the reward of one who prolongs amen is double: he merits both *arichus yamim*, in quality – that his days will be long in his eyes because they will be filled with goodness and blessing (see *Yevamos* 63b) and *arichus shanim* – literally, that he will live additional years. The reason that the reward for one who answers amen is doubled is because amen is numerically equivalent to 91, which is the value of the two holy Names of Havay-ah and Adnus, therefore the one who prolongs it merits reward for each Name in its own right (*Ben Yehoyada Brachos* *ibid*). And the *Talmud Yerushalmi* (*Brachos* 8 8) explains that one who answers a long amen “has his days and years prolonged *letovah*, for good things.”

The *Tur* (124) brings the version of many of the *Rishonim* on the words of *Ben Azai* (*ibid*): “One who answers a shortened amen – will have his days shortened.” And see *Zohar* (*Shelach* 162 1): “One who cuts short his amen – his life in this world will be cut short”, and the explanation of the commentaries there.

Chazal further say (*ibid*) that “anyone who answers amen for too long – is making a mistake.” *Tosafos* explains the reason for this (*ibid ad loc. Kol*) that when one prolongs it too much, he removes the meaning from the word amen. The *Shulchan Aruch* rules this way (*ibid*).

Razei Emunim

Pearls of Amen in the Parashah

In the Presence of the Leaders of Thousands

“אלה קרואי העדה השיאי מטות אבותם ראשי אלפי ישראל הם” (א טז)

Chazal (*Shabbos* 119b) say “anyone who answers amen with all his strength has the gates of Gan Eden opened to him.” The *Maharsha* (Vol. I, *Shabbos* 119b) derived from the fact that the *Gemara* states “*Poschim lo shaarei Gan Eden*” – in the plural, that the one who answers amen has all the gates of the various levels of Gan Eden open to him, not only the special level that he has earned. Because while a person merits for all *mitzvos* a level in Gan Eden based on his deeds – as *Chazal* say (*Shabbos* 152a): “Each and every *tzaddik* is given a level based on his honor,” – one who fulfills the mitzvah

of answering amen with all his strength is exceptional. He merits to have the gates of all the levels of Gan Eden open for him – even those that, according to his level, he would not normally merit (see *Zohar Terumah* 178 1).

The *dorshei reshumos* learn an allusion to this from the *passuk* in this *parashah*: “*נשיאי מטות אבותם*” - is an acronym for amen, to teach us that one who answers amen merits to sit with the “*keru’ei ha’eidah*,” the leaders, in Gan Eden, when the gates of all the levels will be open to him.”

Kerem Da”l

Be Careful About Answering Amen

“ואתה הפקד את הלויים על משכן העדת ועל כל כליו ועל כל אשר לו המה ישאו את המשכן ואת כל כליו והם ישרתהו וסביב למשכן יחנו” (א נ)

Harav Yaakov Abuchatzera, the *Abir Yaakov*, explained:

הלויים is numerically equivalent to amen, and because the name לוי symbolizes an accompaniment and connection, as it says (*Bereishis* 29:34): “הפעם ילוה” - “איש אליו... על כן קרא שמו לוי.” We should learn that the essence of amen is the connection of the Names of Havay-ah and Adnus and together they are numerically equivalent to amen.

HaKadosh Baruch Hu commanded *Moshe* “הפקד את הלויים” - warn *Klal Yisrael* about answering amen “as many actions are done Above through answering amen because through this they connect the Names of Havay-ah and Ado-n-ai, and elevate the worlds and bring down the abundance.”

Pituchei Chotam

Otzros Emunim

Teaching the Young to Answer Amen

Praising Hashem in Answering Amen

Harav Menachem Mendel of Riminov would explain the *passuk* (Vayikra 19:23-24): “For three years they should be *arelim* and not be eaten; in the fourth year, all of its fruits should be *kodesh hilulim l’Hashem*.” Based on the words of Chazal that a baby merits Olam Haba from the time he answers amen: in the first three years, he is still considered an *arel*. But “in the fourth year” when he already knows how to speak, his father teaches him to praise Hashem by answering amen, and from then “all his fruits will be *kodesh hilulim l’Hashem*.” (Menachem Tzion Parashas Hamann)

The Chinuch Necessary In Our Generation

The Divrei Emunah of Toldos Aharon, *zt”l*, said:

In past generations, when *tefillah* was said with great fervency, then it was not necessary to invest special energy to infuse the youngsters with the importance of *tefillah*, because they were influenced by the *tefillos* of their parents. But today, when regretfully, *tefillah* is done with laxity, and with a coolness, then we need to invest energy and to watch the children to make sure they daven. Because if we do not invest in this, the children can lose a connection and sense of belonging to *tefillah*, and the results can be very difficult, *chalilah*. I have already seen in several shuls that during davening, the children play outside and hardly daven a word, aside for those children who have a natural affinity for *tefillah*.

Therefore, we need to watch the children and be *mechanech* them already from an early age to daven according to *halachah*, as it says (Mishlei 22:6) “*Chanoch lana’ar al pi darko gam ki yazkin lo yasur mimenah*.” This supervision has to include making sure that the children should not miss *tefillos*, should not daven too quickly, should not speak during *Chazaras Hasha”tz* and that they should answer amen, and *amen yehei Shemei Rabba* aloud and with *kavanah*.

Hadrachah L’Melamdim Ulechinuch Habanim, Ma’amar Chinuch Habanim p. 5

Iggeres Emunim

A Letter from a Loyal Reader

Dear *Bney Emunim*,

In the last year, since I began reading your wonderful pamphlets that you publish, I have also gotten caught up in the wave of those who answer amen after *Birchos Hashachar*...I have merited *baruch Hashem* to answer amen to *Birchos Hashachar* hundreds of times. Recently, I even merited a sort of *chaburah* for strengthening the answering of amen for the children in our community, and *bechasdei Hashem*, I see much success in my work, as the activities expand.

I would like to share with you an incident of *Hashgachah pratis* that I had on this matter. This week, I needed to get up early one day to daven in a *minyán* where I don’t know a single one of the *mispallelim*. Of course, I did not want to cancel my *brachos*, and somewhat awkwardly, I looked for someone to answer amen to my *brachos*.

After just one minute, one of the *mispallelim* approached me and asked me to be *motzi* him for the *brachah* of *Hama’avir Sheinah*. He then added that I shouldn’t suspect him of being up all night, rather because he had said the *brachos* very quickly, he did not remember if he had said this *brachah* or not.

Of course, I was very happy for this, and made all the *brachos* slowly, and he answered amen to all my *brachos*. I thought to myself, if he would also take upon himself to say *Birchos Hashachar* for someone answer amen after him, surely he would not have been able to forget if he had said a certainly *brachah* or not...

Thank you again for all your work.

Menachem G.

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Shaarei Gan Eden

Amen and Brachos in the Teachings of a Baal Hayahrtzeit



The beis medrash of the Baal Shem Tov in Mezibuzh

The Baal Shem Tov

6 Sivan 5520

Harav Yisrael, known as the Baal Shem Tov, was born in the village of Okopy, Ukraine, to his father, Rav Eliezer and his mother, Sarah. His parents were very elderly at his birth, and passed away when he was very young. Already from a very early age, he would often be *misboded*, alone, and spoke to his Creator.

When he was fourteen, the *mekubal* Rav Adam Baal Shem sent him a package of writings including secrets of Torah that related to the root of his *neshamah*.

When he reached the age of thirty six, his light began to shine for all to see. He quickly became famous and settled in the city of Mezibuzh, and many streamed to his court. The most famous of his disciples are the Maggid of Mezeritsch – his successor and the one who continued his ways; his brother-in-law Rav Gershon of Kotzov; Harav Yaakov Yosef of Polnoa, the Toldos Yaakov Yosef; Harav Pinchas of Koritz, Harav Yechiel Michel of Zlotchov; Harav Leib the Shpoler Zeide, and many more.

In 5520, on the first day of Shavuos, the Baal Shem Tov passed away and was buried in the cemetery in Mezibuzh.

Birchos Hashachar in Shul

The Rebbe Harav Eliezer Tzvi of Komarna wrote in his introduction to the *sefer Ohr Einayim* (Vol. II, Klal 21) that each person in Klal Yisrael “especially one who has a precious soul” must say *Birchos Hashachar* in shul, in order to give a merit to another person to answer amen. He then added that “**and this is what the Baal Shem Tov, *zt”l*, used to do.**”