

# VeChol Maaminim

A Weekly Pamphlet From "Bney Emunim"

Parashas BALAK | 5783 | Issue No. 490



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## Peninei Emunim

Pearls of Tefillah in the Parashah

## Pischu Shearim

Open the Gates

### 'He Should Be Strong Like a Lion' – Against Nature

“הן עם כלביא יקום וכארי יתנשא לא ישכב עד יאכל טרף דם חללים ישתה” (כג כד)

Harav Yaakov Baal HaTurim begins the *Arba'as Haturim* (*Orach Chaim* 1) with the well-known words of the Tanna Yehuda ben Teima (*Avos* 5:20): “Be strong like a leopard and light like an eagle run like a deer and strong like a lion to do the Will of your Father in heaven.” He then instructs as a result: “Therefore a person needs to be strong like a lion to stand in the morning to serve his Creator.”

The *Chiddushei HaRim* asked: Why did the *Tur* choose to bring as a proof of this directive the words of the Tanna and not the words of this *passuk*: “*Hen am kelavi yakum uke'ari yisnasa*”? This is especially since the Tanna did not specifically note that his words were related to rising early in the morning, but rather, he said them in general: “To do the Will of your Father in heaven,” while this *passuk* is explained specifically to refer to arising in the morning (*Tanchuma* 14, cited in *Rashi*)?

He explained: The *passuk* “*hen am kelavi yakum uke'ari yisnasa*” was not said as an order, but rather as a prophecy that Bilam made about the nature that is ingrained in the souls of Am Yisrael to be strong like a lion and to rise to the service of Hashem. As such, because this *middah* is only ingrained in the souls of the *tzaddikim*, whose hearts remain strong like a lion against the temptations of the *yetzer hara* and sin, and as such Yehuda ben Teima instructed those who, due to their sins have lost this nature, to not give in. They should overpower their nature like a lion to rise early to serve Hashem. Therefore, the *Tur* based his directive to overpower like a lion by rising in the morning on the words of the Tanna, and not on the *passuk* that is said about the *tzaddikim*, who are ingrained with this *middah* and thus do not need this directive.

*Sefer Hazechus Orach Chaim* 1 1

A word from the founder and Nasi of Bney Emunim

### Rising Early to Answer Amen

In this week's *parashah*, we read the *passuk* (*Bamidbar* 23:24): “*Hein am kelavi yakum uke'ari yisnasa*, behold a people that rises like a young lion, and lifts itself up like a lion.” *Rashi* explains the words of Bilam's prophecy in praise of Bnei Yisrael: “When they rise from their slumber in the morning, they are as vigorous as the young lion and the lion, to snatch the *mitzvos*, wearing a *tallis*, reading the *Shema* and putting on *tefillin*.”

I have always wondered what the term “snatch the *mitzvos*” means and what this term is used for.

An acquaintance told me recently that in *sefer Toldos Yaakov*, authored by one of the sages of Italy about 400 years ago, the author points out that the acronym of the final letter of the words *הן עם כלביא* allude to the holy word ‘amen’ while the word *יקום* is comprised of the letters *ק' יום* – an allusion to the one hundred *brachos* that Am Yisrael recite each day. The author then explains that this allusion teaches us that because Bilam saw that despite all his efforts to curse Am Yisrael, they are still rising up like a lion in front of him, he admitted to Balak that all his efforts had been fruitless. The reason for this is because their recital of one hundred *brachos* every day, and answering amen after *brachos*, protected Am Yisrael from his attempts to harm them.

And on the subject of amen, then the meaning of the expression “*lachtof es hamitzvos*” is clear, as it is incumbent upon us to rise each morning to shul a short time before davening, at the time when there are usually *brachos* “rolling” out of people's mouths, and we can then “snatch” as many amens as possible... just like the lion rises early to snatch prey for its sustenance.

Yes! The mitzvah of answering amen is only merited by someone who is on guard, like a *shomer emunim*, with expectation, to hear the *brachos* of the *mevarech*.

Another point: Here, too, like in many other places, the *passuk* precedes the *remez* of answering amen before the mention of the *brachos*, in accordance with the words of Chazal (*Brachos* 53a) that “the one who answers amen is greater than the *mevarech*.”

Let us remember that with a bit of willpower to rise up early to go to shul a few minutes before davening, we can, with relative ease, merit treasures of amens, which will protect us from those who seek to do bad to us, and which will bring upon us an abundance of goodness always. Amen.

Good Shabbos

Yaakov Dov Marmurstein

### A Great Light in a Great Home

This story was related by the renowned *mashpia* Harav Eliyahu Roth, *zt"l*, the loyal *meshamesh* of Harav Shlom'ke of Zhvill, *zy"ra*, in one of the many *shmuessen* he gave about the importance of saying *brachos* with *kavanah*.

One year, the holy Ohr Hachaim had the opportunity to spend Seder night in the home of an elderly couple, simple people. Over the time that he spent with them, the Ohr Hachaim could not help but notice and marvel at the special light that glowed from their faces, a light that was not usually evident on the faces of regular people.

In his great holiness, the Ohr Hachaim realized that there was something more to this, and before departing from their home, he asked the host to explain how he and his wife had merited such a lofty status.

The host pondered for a bit, and then recounted the story that he thought perhaps could be an explanation:

"In our home," he began, "we have always been strict to recite *brachos* aloud, with vitality and pleasantness.



The tziyun of the Ohr Hachaim Hakadosh on Har Hazeisim in Yerushalayim

This practice has had a positive influence on our home, and although we've never been financially stable, that did not affect the mood and joy of our children. We merited to see them growing on Torah and *yiras Shamayim*, as we hoped they would.

"Even though we were happy with our lot, we were even happier when, one day, a surprise guest turned up at our door. He was a distinguished looking man, with a long white beard; his demeanor radiated good will and a desire to help.

"The man entered our home, and when he saw the poverty, he generously opened his wallet and offered his help. From that day one, he was

like our angel of rescue. We did not understand what he had seen in us, but we joyfully accepted all the goodness and *chessed* that he showered us with. He made sure to fill our cabinets with an abundance of good, fresh food; he replaced our meager, broken pieces of furniture with high quality, modern furnishings, and even gave us a generous sum to purchase new, warm clothes for our children, who until then had not been dressed with sufficient garments against the cold.

"In the coming months, our lives changed drastically, and we went from being desperately poor to rich. For a short time, we felt like we had merited a special Divine illumination; the man acquired our full trust, but at one point, we began to suspect the purity of his intentions.

"It happened when one day, the man began, first gently, but then more aggressively, to preach to us and share his distorted spiritual views. Unsurprisingly, he first tried to weaken our strictness about *brachos*. He claimed that it was not polite to make *brachos* aloud. 'HaKadosh Baruch Hu hears you quietly as well...' he said. 'There's no reason to scream.'

"Even though we were suspicious, we had apparently been blinded by the abundance that the man had showered us with. Because of his appearance as a *talmid chacham*, and his very smooth talking, his words began to penetrate our hearts. First we tried to argue, but when we realized that he was conditioning his help to us on listening to him, we capitulated.

"We closed our eyes so we could ignore the clear signs that our home was beginning to lose its spiritual identity; as our material situation improved, our spiritual situation declined. My wife was the first to recover. When she saw how our children were beginning to lose their interest and warmth that they had had for *tefillah* and learning, and instead they were cool and apathetic, to the point of *kalus rosh*, she could no longer remain silent.

"Even though deep down it was clear to me as well who was responsible for the deteriorating situation, when my

wife demanded firmly that I could no longer allow this bad person to visit our home, I struggled to hear her. I could not entertain the idea that all this goodness would stop at once.

"But my wife pressed me, pleasantly but determinedly, to end this bad relationship. She explained to me with clear proof that the purpose of this old man was singular – to make our home deteriorate, step by step, until we would lose our *emunah*, *chalilah*, and that it was possible that he is the emissary of the Satan who was envious of the loftier path we had imbued in our home and the *chinuch* of our children.

"It is not for naught that this man has chosen to incite us specifically on the subject of *brachos*,' my wife claimed, 'if not for the fact that he understood that as long as we continue this conduct he would not have the ability to have an influence on us, because of our *yiras Shamayim*, and because of the power of the *brachos* that we say aloud and with *kavanah*.'

"Slowly, I was persuaded. Despite the tremendous difficulty involved, and the clear knowledge that what we were going to do meant reverting back to poverty, which we had more or less forgotten about, I decided to be *moser nefesh* for the future of our children.

"The next day, when the old man appeared at our door, as he had been doing every day for a while, I informed him very firmly that he was no longer welcome in our home, and from now on, our door would be closed to him.

"At first he tried to explain, then he began to threaten, and finally he took all that he had given us and fled with the slam of a door. And since then, to this day, we have been very poor materially, but rich spiritually.

"In order to rectify that which had been wrong, we took upon ourselves to become even stronger in the *minhag* to recite *brachos* aloud and with *kavanah*. Today, years after that story, *baruch Hashem* we see much *nachas* from our offspring, all of whom are following the path of Torah and *mesorah*.

"Who knows, perhaps that *mesirus nefesh* is what made us be *zocheh* to this great light that Rabbeinu said he saw in our home," the older man concluded, and the Ohr Hachaim nodded his head in agreement.

## — The Kavanah of Amen —

The Obligation of *Kavanah*

**One should not answer amen without *kavanah*. Therefore, a person should not be distracted when someone is saying a *brachah* or *Kaddish*, so that he can have the right *kavanah* when answering amen after them.**

## Sources and Explanations

In *Maseches Brachos* (47a) we learn: “One should not answer an *amen chatufah*...and one should not throw a *brachah* out of his mouth.” *Rashi* explained: “And he should not throw a *brachah* from his mouth with the speed that makes it appear as a burden [and he is only making the *brachah* because] it is a statute.” But the *Tur* (*Orach Chaim* 124) seems to explain that the meaning of the *Breisa* is to forbid throwing an amen from his mouth “that he should not hurry to say it without *kavanah*.” The *Mateh Moshe* (170) and the *Maharal* (*Nesivos Olam Nesiv Ha’avodah* 11) concurred. The words of *Resh Lakish* (*Shabbos* 119b) should also be noted here: “Anyone who answers amen with all his strength has the gates of Gan Eden open to him.” And according to *Rashi*’s explanation (ibid ad loc. *bechol*) “*bechol kocho*” means with all his *kavanah*.

The holy *Zohar* (*Vayeilech* 285 2) goes to great lengths about the severity of the sin of answering amen without *kavanah*, and wrote that “anyone who hears a *brachah* from the *mevarech* and does not have *kavanah* when answering amen, of him it is said (*Shmuel* I, 2:30) “*Ubozai yekalu*,” and he expounded there on the extent of the punishment. The *Rema*”z in his commentary on the *Zohar* (ibid) explains the reason why someone who does not have *kavanah* in amen is included in the rule of those who are *mevazeh* Hashem and are punished so severely: “Because it [amen] is an easy thing to understand and to have *kavanah* with, meaning it is the simplest of the *sodos*, that the word amen [is equivalent] to the Names of Hava-y-ah and A-donai. The *Rema*”z adds that based on the *Zohar* that the *passuk* “*ubozai yekalu*” is said about someone who does not have *kavanah* when answering amen, then the *Arizal*’s intention is explained, as he said (*Pri Eitz Chaim Shaar Kavanas Amen*) that the final letters of the words of the *passuk* (*Tehillim* 83:17): מלא פניהם קלון form the word amen. The *sefer Yosed Veshoresh Ha’avodah* (*Shaar Hakorban* Chapter 6) wrote that one who sees these words of the *Zohar* will have: “Rivers of water falling from his eyes that they did not keep to answering amen properly, he will not lay during the day and at night he will not rest, from the fear in his heart that he will fear, and from the scenes his eyes will see...” In this context, the *Yesod Veshoresh Ha’avodah* wrote of himself in his will (15) “I was very careful to answer amen after the *mevarech*, with the *kavanah* that I wrote my works, meaning that I had *kavanah* when I said amen to affirm the praise of the *brachah*, and I did not utter from my mouth words of amen without *kavanah*, and you should be very, very careful about this.”

The *Shelah* (*Maseches Tamid* 80) expounded as well on

the great virtue of listening to the *brachah* and *tefillah* in order to answer amen with *kavanah*.

He wrote: “And whoever has *kavanah* for every single *brachah* that emerges from the mouth of the *mevarech* and answers amen with *kavanah*, as is the *halachah*, causes very much holiness On High, and brings down an abundance of good to all the worlds, because it opens the Higher Source, the *Mekor Mayim Chaim*, like the spring is opened to provide water for all that need watering...”

The *Maharal* (ibid) holds that having *kavanah* when answering amen is *l’ikuvah*, meaning that it is conditional “and if he answers amen without *kavanah* it is not an amen at all.” That is because answering amen is a declaration of faith in the words of the *mevarech* (see *Rabbeinu Bechayei Shemos* 14:31), and “something that is not understood is not called *emunah*.”

It is brought in the name of Harav Chaim of Volozin that he did not find any *limud zechus* – a defense – for saying amen without *kavanah* (*Kesser Rosh* 25). The *sefer Manchil Emunah* (p. 2) explained that the reason for this is because answering amen is a mitzvah that can easily be fulfilled (and as the *Rema*”z wrote above). The *sefer Nefesh Shimshon* in the section on *tefillah* also explains (p. 242) that because the word amen in and of itself does not have a meaning and significance, and the whole concept is only the affirmation of the words of the *mevarech*, therefore, if he does not have *kavanah* when answering it, it is as though he did not say anything. Harav Yitzchak Zev of Brisk explained (*Kesser Meluchah* p. 286): Answering amen as lip service without *kavanah* is like a “body without a soul” and therefore, one who answers amen without *kavanah* is considered not to have said anything. It is not like *tefillah*, which is instituted to correspond to the *korbanos*, because even if one does not have *kavanah*, one can compare *tefillah* to a *Korban Minchah* that is brought from an inanimate object that has no soul (as explained in *Kesser Rosh* 22). And see *Noam Migadim* (*Parashas Mishpatim*) that amen that is answered without *kavanah* is called “*amen almanah*” a widowed amen, because it is like a “body without a soul” and the soul is compared to a husband because it infuses life into the body.

However, the *Pele Yoetz* wrote (*Chessed L’alafim* 56 1) that even answering amen without *kavanah* has value and importance. He wrote: “Even though answering *Kaddish* and amen without *kavanah* is not as good as answering with *kavanah*, still, even if he does not know to have *kavanah* he should not answer less, because it seems that the words make an impression On High.” The *Shevet Halevi* also ruled that those who answer amen without *kavanah* are *yotzei*. Therefore, in a place where we answer a few amens one after the other, like in “*Zachreinu Hashem Elokein bo letovah*...” in *Yaaleh Veyavo*, it is preferable to be strict to answer all the amens, than to answer only some of them with *kavanah* (*Mibeis Levi, Kovetz* 12, p. 61).

## From Gehinnom to Gan Eden in the Merit of Amen

Harav Moshe ben Makir, in his *sefer Seder Hayom (Kavanas Brachos)* wrote very awesome things about the power of answering amen: “One who answers amen grows and perpetuates the force of *kedushah* and purity and weakens and breaks the force of impurity. Therefore, it was instituted to say *Kaddish* for the dead, because when answering amen with all one’s strength, the force of purity is perpetuated, and the Gehinnom is cooled one and a half hours (see *Zohar* 58 62 2) and it banishes the force of impurity so that it should not control his father or mother at that time, and on the contrary, they bring him to Gan Eden.”

Dear *Vechol Ma’aminim*, and its director, Rabbi Yaakov Dov Marmurstein, *shlita*:

There is a well-known story in the *Midrash* in *Parashas Metzora (Vayikra Rabbah* 16b) about the peddler who went around the towns near Tzipori and offered anyone who wanted the “elixir of life.” Rabi Yannai heard him and asked about the elixir. The peddler took out a *Sefer Tehillim* and showed him the *pesukim* (34:13-14): “*Mi ha’ish hechafetz chaim ohev yamim liros tov; netzor leshoncha meira usefasecha midaber mirmah.*” Rabbi Yannai heard this and said: “All my life I would read this *passuk* and I didn’t know how simple it was, until this peddler came.” The question is well known: What did the peddler enlighten Rabbi Yannai about? The explanation is given that Rabbi Yannai marveled at the peddlers simple *emunah peshutah* in the words of the *passuk*, without any explanations or doubts. His *emunah* was so strong, that he offered these words as merchandise that he could sell to anyone who wanted, as he announced: one who seeks life should hold his tongue – this is what it says and this is what will be!

I think that this story reflects your work. Like that peddler, you reach all the corners and camps and declare: “Who wants an elixir for life?” You remind everyone that *Chazal (Brachos* 47a; *Shabbos* 119b) have promised many things to one who is strict about answering amen: a long life, opening of gates, the tearing up of decrees. And as it says, so it will be because the words of *Chazal* are not empty! The constant declaration that you emit, in the form of your pamphlets, which besides the rich content also emanate

complete *emunah* in the power of answering amen, and through your various activities whose goal is to infuse the *tzibbur* with the importance of answering amen, all penetrate the hearts of people.

The Ramchal at the beginning of his introduction to *Mesilas Yesharim*, wrote: “I have not compiled this work to teach people anything they do not know, but rather, to remind them of what they know and has already been widely publicized, because you will not find in most of my words anything that most people don’t know and do not doubt. But because they are so widely publicized, and because their truth is open to all, that is why it is very common to ignore and forget them.”

You as well, do not come to be *mechadesh* and to teach new things, but rather to remind of things that have been forgotten, as you wrote in your Pesach edition this year in the name of Rav Wosner, who defined this mitzvah as being “forgotten and then once again reestablished.”

Keep up your work, keep on disseminating the Torah of answering amen and glorifying it in Am Yisrael, until we merit to see “*Yemalei Kevodo es kol ha’aretz amen v’amen.*”

**With respect and appreciation,  
Yom Tov Friedman**

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## Shaarei Gan Eden

Amen and Brachos in the Teachings of a Baal Hayahrtzeit



A memorial stone for Rav Yaakov Baal Haturim placed by the Ohalei Tzaddikim organization in the Jewish cemetery in Chios.

### Harav Yaakov Baal Haturim

12 Tammuz 5103

Rav Yaakov, the third son of the Rosh, was born in Germany in 5029, approximately. He learned from his father, who he quotes often in his *seforim*. Together with his father, he traveled to Barcelona, Spain, and later settled in Toledo.

Rav Yaakov became known as the Baal Haturim, for the name of the halachic work that he wrote, which is divided into four ‘*Turim*’: *Orach Chaim*, *Yoreh Deah*, *Choshen Mishpat* and *Even Ha’ezer*. He also compiled a commentary on the Torah, and he preceded each *parashah* with *gematrios* and allusions. The printers of the *Chumash*

printed only these *gematrios* and allusions as a commentary under the name *Baal Haturim*. Despite his great stature, he declined to serve in *rabbanus*, and he lived in great poverty, as he wrote of himself in his *sefer (Tur Orach Chaim* 242). His *matzeivah* bears the words: “all his days were pain and he suffered greatly with love.”

There is a dispute about where he passed away and is buried. Some believe he passed away and was buried in Toledo, and indeed, it is known that there was a headstone in the cemetery there with his name etched into it. But the Chida wrote (*Shem Hagedolim* 10:208) that Rav Yaakov passed away on his way to Eretz Yisrael and is buried on the Greek island of Chios.

### Caution! A Short Amen

*Chazal* say (*Brachos* 47a): “Anyone who prolongs his amen has his days and years prolonged.” The *Tur (Orach Chaim* 124) added the version that many of the Rishonim bring in the Gemara there: “One who answers a short amen – will have his days shortened.” Therefore, a person should be careful not to utter amen quickly, and should prolong the pronunciation for as long as it takes to say ‘*Kel Melech Ne’eman.*’ (*Bais Yosef*, *ibid*)