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The Power of Amein On the Train



Rav Elya Lopian, zt'l

R' Yoni Schwartz related a story. Some time ago in Eretz Yisroel, Rav Elya Lopian, zt'l, was traveling with his Talmidim on a train. Due to security threats, police were stationed in every booth of train. In the middle of the ride, Rav Elya excused himself from his Talmidim and went to use the restroom.

The Rav loved to bless Hashem, so when he came back, he told the police man next to him in the booth, with great excitement, that he was about to say the Brachah of Asher Yatzar. He explained that this Brachah praises Hashem for the health He gives us, and for all of His wondrous deeds. He also asked the guard to

respond with “Amein” after he said the Brachah. The secular guard liked this idea, and he called all the other guards over to answer “Amein” together with him. Rav Elya began to say the Brachah with the greatest Kavanah and enthusiasm, and when he finished, all the guards screamed “Amein” in unison so loudly, that it could be heard on the other side of the train.

This loud sound startled the conductor so much, that when he heard it, it caused him to pull the breaks on the train. The train stopped on its tracks, and the conductor came out asking if everything was okay. He was told that everybody was fine, and they were just saying “Amein” to the Rabbi’s Brachah.

When the conductor got back in front to start driving the train again, he looked at the tracks just in front of him, and his face turned white. Right in front of where the train had stopped, a bomb was placed on the tracks, and it was big enough to blow up the entire train. If it were not for the Brachah of Rav Elya and the Amein of the guards, many people would have been harmed. Indeed, as the Brachah of Asher Yatzar concludes, Hashem is “Mafla La’asos,” the One who acts wondrously!

Reprinted from the Parshas Kedoshim 5784 email of Rabbi Yehuda Winzelberg’s Torah U’Tefilah.

Flying to Miami on a Private Plane

By Rabbi David Ashear

During the Covid pandemic, Yissachar*, a young man from Brooklyn, was given information about a potential shidduch in Miami. After the investigative process was completed, it was determined that they might very well be a great shidduch.

Yissachar was ready to fly south to meet the girl – but there was a hitch. “Oh, there’s one thing you should know,” said the rabbi from Miami with whom he was communicating. “You will not be allowed into any shul unless your first quarantine for two weeks in Miami.”

Yissachar had recently lost his father and was careful never to miss saying Kaddish. “Please, I have antibodies,” he pleaded, but the rabbi held firm. “Sorry. You’re still not going to be allowed in.”

It seemed they had hit a brick wall, as Yissachar refused to go to Florida unless he had a minyan. The rabbi joked, “Well, maybe if you come by private plane I’ll let you into my shul.”

Obviously, that would be impossible. Or would it? After he hung up the phone, Yissachar called an acquaintance. “By any chance, do you know of anyone with a private plane who might be going to Miami in the near future, who would allow me to fly with them?”

“You won’t believe it,” the acquaintance replied, “but I do know some people. I’ll call them now and find out.”

He called back a few minutes later. “It just so happens that these people I know are flying on Sunday to Miami and returning on Thursday. When I told them you needed to say Kaddish, they happily agreed to offer you a seat on their plane.”

Yissachar is singing the praises of Hashem. He needed the impossible, and within a few minutes, Hashem arranged it for him. And the shidduch was arranged as well, concluded with an engagement!

Reprinted from the Parshas Terumah 5785 email of The Weekly Vort. Excerpted from the ArtScroll book – “Living Emunah on Shidduchim.”

Who Needs to Refine His Middos (Character Traits)?

There is story that took place a long time ago in the city of Vilna. There was a poor shoemaker named Zelig. He was a simple person who was always happy with the little he had, even though at times it was very difficult for him. He never complained.

One day, Zelig inherited a small fortune from a distant uncle, and overnight, he was able to start living more comfortably. Zelig became a tremendous Baal Tzedakah, and shared his new wealth with those who were less fortunate than he was. Within a short time, he became a leader in the community.

Zelig’s son was an excellent young Talmid Chacham, and now, due to his family’s wealth, he had many new opportunities in the area of Shidduchim, and the Rav of the town was honored to take Zelig’s son as a husband for his daughter. To be chosen by the Rav of the community to be his son-in-law was a great honor, both for Zelig’s son and for Zelig.

Both families greatly anticipated the big day of the Chasunah, and when the day arrived, and the entire community showed up for the event. It was a beautiful

and impressive Simchah. It was a very emotional moment when, following the Chupah, the guests lined up to wish a Mazel Tov to the parents of the Chosson and Kallah.

There was one person who had terrible Middos, and he could not find it in him to be happy for Zelig and his new wealth. He remembered not so long ago when he would bring his torn shoes to Zelig to have them repaired. This unpleasant, sad person walked up to Zelig, and in front of everyone, held up a torn shoe. He asked, "Tell me, Zelig, is it worth fixing this shoe? And how much will the repair cost me?"

Everyone stood there in shock. No one said a word. Suddenly, Zelig turned white, and he passed out. Doctors were called and emergency resuscitation was started, but it was too late. Zelig had passed away. The beautiful Simchah was turned into tremendous grief and mourning.



Rav Yisroel Salanter, zt"l;

When Rav Yisroel Salanter, zt"l, heard about this terrible story, he was very disturbed. He did not calm down until he established a Bais HaMussar, a Bais Medrash specifically for the study of Middos, where one can work on and refine his character traits. Rav Yisroel said that unless one studies and focuses on perfecting

his Middos, he could fall so low that he could commit murder, R”L, as they saw by what had happened in Vilna.

What Was the Cause for the Creation of the Bais HaMussar:

The Sefer Chaim She’yeish Bahem quotes Rav Nota Tzeinvirt, zt”l, who wondered what actually caused the creation of the Bais HaMussar. It certainly couldn’t be because of the wicked individual who had insulted a fellow Jew, and hurt him so dreadfully that he died as a result of the embarrassment. This is a rare level of evil that was found in this person, and without a doubt, the vast majority of people would not behave in this manner. It can’t be that Rav Yisroel opened the Bais HaMussar for this type of uniquely cruel individual. There must have been another reason. Rav Nota therefore suggests that the Bais HaMussar was not because of the attacker, but rather, it was because of Zelig, the man who died as a result of the insult.

How Could One Forget How Beautiful His Life Was

It bothered Rav Yisroel Salanter so much that a person can die from being humiliated. Why was Zelig so disturbed by the embarrassment that he suffered? He was a wealthy and successful leader of the community. His son had just married the daughter of the Rav. His life was beautiful! Why did he care so much about what people might think, or because of the outrageous way someone acted towards him? Why faint because an evil person acted outrageously? Why was he so bothered and fragile about being embarrassed to the point of death?

The Crucial Need for a Bais HaMussar

Many people endure difficulties in their lives. Yet, they live full and happy lives, choosing to experience their suffering quietly, without seeking attention. If a person can become so affected by an insult that he is unable to see past it and look at all the positive things that are currently going on in his life, then there is a crucial need for a Bais HaMussar, where people can learn that events occur and things happen because Hashem runs the world. Overreacting to occurrences in life is a sign of a lack of Emunah!

Reprinted from the Parshas Kedoshim 5784 email of Rabbi Yehuda Winzelberg’s Torah U’Tefilah.

The Convincing Words of the Apostate Jew

From the Desk of Yerachmiel Tilles

In a city not far from Apta, there lived a Jewish apostate who caused his former brethren much trouble and heartache. He rose to a very high position in the government, becoming one of the king's most trusted officials. He made sure to utilize his position to make the Jews' lives miserable.

Every once in a while, the king would meet with all his ministers to discuss various issues and discuss all sorts of ideas that might benefit the inhabitants of the kingdom. The apostate considered these meetings prime opportunities to disparage the Jews, his former brothers, in the eyes of the king.

At one such meeting, one of the officials, also a virulent anti-Semite, rose and told the king a shocking tale. In his village, he said, a non-Jewish girl had gone out to draw water from the well and never returned home. She simply disappeared without a trace! It was erev Pesach, a time when Klal Yisrael (the Jewish people) was preparing for the holy holiday by eliminating the chametz (leavened foods) from their homes and baking matzot.

After much investigation, said the official, it was discovered that the Jews were to blame for the girl's disappearance; they had murdered her in order to mix her blood into their holiday matzot. All those present at the meeting were horrified by the minister's story and their fury knew no bounds. They drew up a terrible decree that would affect all the Jews in the kingdom.

In order for the decree to be valid, the document needed all the officials' signatures. When it came to the apostate's turn to sign, however, a spirit of purity overcame him. Instead of enthusiastically joining the officials in drawing up a decree against the Jews, whom he so despised, he rose and announced to all the ministers that he too was a Jew and the whole accusation was a ridiculous bluff.

He explained that the consumption of blood was one of the most serious prohibitions in Jewish law. He knew this for certain, he assured the king and the ministers, for he had grown up among the Jews, and he knew their customs well. His sincere words convinced the king and the ministers, especially since they knew him to be a renegade Jew who was a sworn enemy of his former people, and not one to speak well of them under ordinary circumstances. If he was defending the Jews, they felt certain, he must be speaking the truth.

And so, in his merit, the decree never came to fruition. The mitzvah of rescuing Jews from destruction awakened hidden sparks within the converted Jew, and he began to want to return to his people and draw closer to Hashem and His Torah. However, he immediately rejected this thought, certain that it would be impossible for him to ever return to his people. The situation seemed hopeless.

Nevertheless, he decided to travel to the Apter Rav and seek his advice. Perhaps the tzadik would be able to help him find a way out; perhaps there was a chance he still could return to the One G-D. His longing to repent gave him no rest. He showed up at the Apter Rebbe's house that very night, brokenhearted and filled with remorse for his evil ways.

When the tzadik saw him and recognized him as the infamous apostate who constantly sought opportunities to cause the Jews no end of tragedy, he grew frightened that the man had come to stir up more trouble. At first, he sought to politely avoid him, apologizing that he was old and weak and hadn't the strength to receive him so late at night.

The man refused to budge, begging the tzadik to hear him out. The Apter Rav, however, had made up his mind not to talk to the loathsome Jew hater, come what may. He told the man that he would speak to him only when grass started growing on the stick standing nearby. Incredibly, the stick immediately began sprouting bright green grass.

When the tzadik saw this miracle, he summoned the apostate into his home and allowed him to speak. The man began telling him all that had happened. He told the tzadik his forceful rejection had aroused in him the desire to abandon his evil ways and return to the Judaism of his parents and ancestors. but didn't know how to go about it.

The Apter Rebbe accepted responsibility to deal with the man's tikkun (rectification). He outlined a path of teshuva (return [to mitzvah observance]) for the man, providing him with a list of behaviors to accept upon himself. The man immediately began acting in accordance with the tzadik's instructions. No more than two weeks passed when the rabbi of the neighboring village sent word to the Apta Rav that the man's house had gone up in flames but no harm had come to the former apostate.

The Apter Rabbi immediately informed the man that his repentance had been accepted by Heaven and he could return to his home, to his worthy wife and children. The man became a true ba'al teshuva – a sincere Torah observant Jew.

Source: Supplemented by R. Yerachmiel Tilles from an article in the 2 Nissan 5700 edition of ???, taken from "Leket Amarim" by R. Yaakov-Meir Shechter (vol.2, p. 170), who writes that this astounding story is copied from the ledgers of the burial society of a particular village in Poland.

Rabbi Yaakov-Meir Shechter, born in 1930 in the Old City of Jerusalem, is a leader of the Breslov Hasidic movement in Israel, a well-known kabbalist, author of 15 books (at last count), and a rosh yeshiva of the main Breslov Yeshiva in Meah Shearim, Jerusalem, and the Shaar Hashamayim Yeshiva in Mekor Baruch, Jerusalem. (based on Wiki)

Reprinted from the April 10, 2024 email of KabbalaOnline.org, a project of Ascent of Safed in Israel.

Right Side Up

By Rabbi Paysach J. Krohn



The Steipler Gaon

Shragi and Bassy Merlin were expecting their sixth child. All the previous births had been uneventful and Dr. Sol Neuhoff, an Orthodox obstetrician with Maimonides Medical Center had no reason to believe that there would be complications with the birth of this child.

The Danger for the Child in the Womb

A few days before the child was to be born, however, Dr. Neuhoff told the mother that the child had turned over and there was a danger that the child could be born in the breech position. Normally a child is born head first, but this child – unless there was some intervention – would be born feet first. This can be dangerous during the birth process or even afterward and it might require the mother to undergo a Caesarean section.

When Mrs. Merlin mentioned this to her sister-in-law, Tamar Gertner, whose husband is a pediatrician in Williamsburg, she said, “It is known that the Steipler Gaon, Rabbi Yaakov Yisrael Kanievsky (1899-1985) said that when an embryo is in this position, one should check the sefarim on the shelves in the home to see if any are upside down. If indeed some of them are, they should be turned right side up. The baby too will be turned over and will be born right side up.”

Quickly Turning the Upside Down Sefarim Right-Side Up

The Merlins immediately began checking their sefarim on their shelves and, indeed, a number of them were upside down. They were quickly turned right side up and sure enough the infant was able to be turned over to the proper position and was born without incident.

What indeed is the connection between sefarim on the shelf standing upside down and a child’s birth? It occurred to me (Rabbi Paysach Krohn) that when the Torah describes the genealogy of man it begins with these words, “Zeh sefer toldot Adam, This is the account of the descendants of Adam” (Beresheet 5:1).

The Literal Meaning of the Words Sefer and Toldot Adam

The word sefer literally means “book.” It is followed by the words toldot Adam, literally “the birth of man.” Thus, homiletically the verse can be understood, “It is through the sefer [or the sefarim], the books on the shelves, that determine the birth of a man.”

Thus, when the sefarim in this home were turned right side up, the same happened with the child in the birth process, just as the Steipler said. (Excerpted from the ArtScroll book –“In the Spirit of the Maggid”)

Reprinted from the Parashat Behaalotecha 5784 email of Rabbi David Bibi’s Shabbat Shalom from Cyberspace.

Chap Arein!

By Aharon Spetner



Illustrated by Miri Weinreb

“Good evening, Ari,” said Anshel Holtzbacher, walking into the house after work.

Ari stood up out of respect for his father. “Good evening, Totty,” he replied.

“How was cheider today?” Anshel asked.

“It was okay,” said Ari.

“Wait, wasn’t today the day that you and your friends were supposed to go after school to help Horki Tomchei Shabbos pack the food packages for poor people?”

“Yeah, I went. It was kind of boring,” said Ari unenthusiastically.

“You found that boring?” Anshel asked incredulously. “It’s the largest tomchei Shabbos operation in the world - I thought you would have found it fascinating.”

“Yeah it was kind of cool,” Ari said. “But there was nothing for me to do. I got there late. Dovy was putting jars of gefilte fish into the packages, Chezky was taking care of the challos, Shimmy was doing the bottles of grape juice, and Sruli was putting in the salt and pepper packets.”

“And they couldn’t find anything that you could help with?”

Ari shrugged. “Sruli offered to let me put the pepper packets while he did the salt, but what was the point? It doesn’t take two people to do the salt and the pepper.” “Ari,” Anshel said. “I think you’re missing something here.”

Ding dong!

“Hold on, there’s someone at the door,” said Anshel. “Let’s continue this conversation later.”

Ari hurried to the front door to see who rang the bell. An older gentleman with a long beard was standing there.

“Hello, my name is Yitzchok Gutstein from Yeshivas Yomam Valayla in Yerushalayim,” the man said. “Is your father home?”

Ari showed Rabbi Gutstein to the living room and went to bring him a drink of water. As he returned, he saw him pleading with his father.

“Reb Anshel,” Rabbi Gutstein begged, a tear rolling down his cheek. “Our yeshiva desperately needs your money. Our bank account is empty and we will lose our building and all of our bochurim if we can’t raise the money we need. Please, please help us.”

“Rabbi Gutstein,” Anshel said. “You’ve got this all wrong. You don’t need me. I need you.”

Rabbi Gutstein looked confused. “What do you mean? I don’t have a penny to my name. The yeshiva hasn’t paid me in months. What could I possibly do for you?”

“You think you need my money?” explained Anshel. “Do you really think Hashem has given me control over whether a yeshiva shuts down or not?”

Rabbi Gutstein frowned. Did this mean he wouldn’t be receiving a check?

“You didn’t come here to ask me for money,” Anshel continued. “Because it is not you who needs my money. Hashem will take care of your yeshiva. You came to give me the opportunity to be a part of your amazing work. It is a tremendous zechus to donate money to tzedakah.”

Anshel handed Rabbi Gutstein a check. “Thank you so much for giving me the ability to have a cheilek in the Torah learning in your yeshiva,” he said.

“Ari,” Anshel said, after Rabbi Gutstein had left. “I want to finish talking to you about what happened at Tomchei Shabbos today.”

“Wait,” said Ari. “I think I know the answer.”

“You do?” asked Anshel.

“Yes,” smiled Ari. “What you said to Rabbi Gutstein made me realize that we weren’t going to Tomchei Shabbos because they need our help. We were going because it was an opportunity to take part in a great mitzvah. So, I should have ‘helped’ Sruli with the salt and pepper even though he was doing just fine on his own - not because he needed help, but because it was a chance for me to be involved in the mitzvah of giving poor families food for Shabbos.”

“Exactly,” Anshel said. “Just like in this week’s parsha when Klal Yisroel brought their donations for the Mishkan. Hashem could have simply provided the materials needed to build the Mishkan. But He wanted to give all of Klal Yisroel the opportunity to be a part of the holy house of Hashem. And by bringing gold, silver, and copper to build the Mishkan, every single Yid got to be a part of creating a place for Hashem to rest His Shechinah in this world.

Reprinted from the Parshas Terumah 5785 email of Toras Avigdor Junior based on the Torah teachings of Rav Avigdor Miller, zt”l.

Keeping Kosher

By Rabbi Nachman Seltzer



There’s a story told by Rabbi Yissochar Frand of two successful Hungarian-Jewish merchants who were arrested by the Spanish Authorities during the Spanish Inquisition under false suspicion that their goods were smuggled or pirated. Due to the strong alliance between the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the Spanish Government did not incarcerate the two merchants During the Spanish Inquisition being a Jew was very dangerous. The government enforced harsh decrees forcing conversion or death to any Jew found. Therefore, the two Jewish merchants disguised themselves as Gentiles.

Each of the merchants was taken home and hosted by a customs official for lunch. The first merchant was seated at the table and served chicken and wine by the

official's servant. The merchant paled and hesitated, as he knew he must keep his Jewish identity a secret.

The Question of the Customs Agent

Suddenly the customs agent got up and asked the merchant to follow him to the attic. There he asked the merchant if he was Jewish. Before the merchant could respond, the customs agent said, "So am I." He explained that he was a descendant of the Marranos, Jews who outwardly converted but kept their Jewish identity a secret. The official bent down and extricated a shechitah – slaughter knife from the floorboards. "The chicken we are about to eat, I personally slaughtered it! Kosher L'Mehadrin!"

Later that day after the investigation concluded that there was nothing wrong with the merchandise, the two merchants met up. The Jew met up with his partner and asked him about his experiences. The second Jew was very distraught. He admitted that he had to eat non-Kosher meat to preserve his appearance as a non-Jew as it was a matter of life and death. The first Jew told his friend, "The same thing happened to me, but I had the unbelievable fortune of being hosted by a secret Jew who knew the laws of Kosher slaughter, and I was able to eat Kosher."

G-d Protects Those Who Are Careful to Only Eat Kosher

When he returned home he asked the Chasam Sofer what was his sin that he was forced to eat non-Kosher and his partner was spared? The Chasam Sofer thought for a moment and replied, "G-d protects all those that are careful to only eat Kosher. 'Measure for measure' the reward for this is that the Almighty will see to it that you in fact never have to eat anything prohibited. Was there ever a time when you ate something with a questionable Kosher status?"

The merchant denied the thought, but after a while, he realized there was a questionable incident when he was newlywed. His wife was unsure of the Kashrut of the chicken she had purchased. Since her husband had learned the laws of slaughter, she asked him. It was a complicated case, and he was too embarrassed to admit that he was unsure, so he declared it Kosher. They ate the chicken.

We can see from here that Hashem protects all who strive to listen to the laws of Kashrut, even when it's hard, inconvenient, or embarrassing. May we all realize that Hashem indeed runs the world and learn from Aharon to accept Hashem's Will with joy immediately. May we also strive to keep the kashrut laws as they're written in our holy Torah because those laws elevate us in both body and soul.

Reprinted from the Parashat Shemini 5784 email of Jack E. Rahmey based on the Torah teachings of Rabbi Amram Sananes.