

When I call out the name of Hashem, ascribe greatness to our G-d. (32:3)

Moshe Rabbeinu commences Shiras Haazinu with Ki shem Hashem ekra havu godel lei'Elokeinu. In his commentary to Berachos 21a, Rashi writes: Ki shem Hashem ekra, "When I call out Hashem's Name;" havu godel lei'Elokeinu, "by saying amen." We cannot overstate the significance of reciting amen following a blessing or kaddish. It incurs extraordinary reward, both in protecting the person and in earning eternal merit for him. A well-known story has circulated concerning the Levush, Horav Mordechai Yoffe, zl, who was invited to lead the Jewish community of Posen. He stipulated that, prior to accepting the position, he had desired to study under the Mahari Abuhav (a Sephardic chacham, living in Venice, Italy), who was a baki, proficient, in ibur ha'chodesh, the method of intercalating the leap years. (Apparently, Sephardic rabbanim had greater proficiency in this area.)

The Levush studied under Mahari Abuhav, Rav Yitzchak Abuhav, for three months. Shortly before leaving, during one of their study sessions, the Mahari's young son recited a brachah over a piece of fruit. Everyone in the household answered amen. The Levush did not. (He probably was of the opinion that one does not have to be so meticulous in responding amen to a child's blessing.) Mahari Abuhav became upset and placed a Nidu, excommunicated, the Levush for thirty days. At the end of the ban, the Levush attempted to appease his mentor. When the Mahari refused to accept his contrition, the Levush asked why he was so upset. Mahari explained that, at the moment he refused to respond amen to the child's brachah, he was deserving of spiritual excision. He would, however, acquiesce to his penance if the Levush would accept upon himself to instruct whomever he came in contact with about the importance of reciting amen. Furthermore, he should instruct all his descendants to repeat the following story.

Prior to the expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492, holy Jewish communities dotted the Spanish landscape. Nonetheless, King Ferdinand, the sponsor of the expulsion, and his partner in crime, Torquemada, the head of the Inquisition, lost no love for the Jews. Whenever the opportunity arose to persecute them, they quickly went about their evil work with glee (of course, all in the name of the religion of love). The king was partial to a rabbi in the community, whom he considered to be a personal friend. Indeed, whenever the Jews were sanctioned with an evil decree, the community would turn to this rabbi, who would successfully intercede on their behalf. When a new decree was issued, the community once again pleaded with the king's friend to advocate on their behalf. He agreed, but asked to first daven Minchah. They said that time was of the essence, and even a few moments can make a difference between life and death. He agreed and left for the palace, where he was welcomed and greeted as a beloved friend. He was there a short while, when a Priest who was a rabid anti-Semite, visited the king. He asked to confer a blessing on the king.

While the priest was droning on in Latin with words of praise and blessing for the king, the rabbi figured he would move to the side and daven Minchah. Sadly, the priest concluded his long-winded tribute in record time, leaving the rabbi still in the middle of Shemoneh Esrai. Thus, when the priest declared that his blessing would only take effect if everyone in attendance answered amen – everyone but the rabbi participated. The priest was furious, blaming the rabbi's obstinacy for his

blessing of the king to fall short of its mark. The king was beyond anger. His animus for the Jews, coupled with his ego, drove him into a frenzy. He immediately issued an order that the rabbi be killed in the most painful and cruel manner, then his body sent home. Ferdinand and his queen (Isabella) signed the final edict for the expulsion of the Jews from Spain on Tishah B'Av, 1492. The Jewish community was numb with shock over the tragedy that had befallen their beloved Rav. Why did he deserve such a brutal death? (His body was hacked and dismembered.) A close friend of the martyred Jew fasted for many days to merit the answer to this pressing question. Finally, the soul of the murdered Jew appeared to the friend and explained that, sometime earlier, he had neglected to answer amen to a child's brachah. The Heavenly Tribunal did not immediately punish him for this. When the priest became angry over his lack of saying amen to the king's tribute, however, Heaven sentenced him to die a horrible death. The Mahari Abuhav concluded the story saying, "Heaven will forgive you on the condition that you publicize this story and encourage everyone to respond amen whenever the opportunity arises."

Horav Eliyahu Lopian, zl, was wont to reiterate, in the name of the Alter, zl, m'Kelm, "It would be worthy for Hashem to have created the entire universe and maintain its existence for six thousand years, just so that one Jew would answer, Baruch Hu u'varuch Shemo, one time! One thousand Baruch hu u'varuch shem's however, do not equal one amen."