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# PARSHA ENCOUNTERS

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Parshas Pinchas ✍️ Rabbi Moshe M. Willner

## True Leaders

A famous midrash reveals why Moshe Rabeinu was found worthy of leading Klal Yisroel. While Moshe Rabeinu was tending to the sheep of Yisro his father-in-law, a sheep wandered away from the flock. Moshe Rabeinu pursued the runaway sheep until he found it drinking at a pool of water. Moshe allowed the sheep to quench its thirst, and then carried the exhausted animal back to the flock. After witnessing this display of devotion, Hakodosh Baruch Hu declared: "If this is the manner in which you tend to the sheep of humans, surely you will be an exceptional shepherd of My flock, Klal Yisroel!"

The Strikover Rebbe poses a thought-provoking question on this midrash. Moshe Rabeinu undeniably performed an act of compassion by pursuing the sheep and caring for its needs. However, how could he justify leaving the entire flock to tend to the needs of one sheep? The Rebbe explains that this episode actually tested Moshe's leadership abilities. Hashem wanted to determine if Moshe understood that a flock is comprised of many individuals. The job of a leader is not to look at Klal Yisroel as an entity in and of itself, but as a nation of individuals.

This idea is reiterated in Parshas Pinchas. When Moshe Rabeinu asks Hashem to appoint a new leader, he addresses Hashem as "Hashem of the **spirits**." Rashi explains that Moshe's choice of title emphasized that a leader of Klal Yisroel needs to be able to discern and nurture the unique **spirit** of each yid. The leader will then be able to guide individuals rather than masses.

Fortunately, throughout the generations Klal Yisroel has merited the leadership of many such leaders. R' Chaim Brisker was a leader of this caliber, as evidenced by the following story:

A mandatory draft was in effect in Czarist Russia. All males were expected to serve the motherland after reaching their 21<sup>st</sup> birthdays. For Yidden, this was a service fraught with danger physically and, of greater concern, spiritually. An exemption from service would be granted if one could obtain false medical reports declaring the bearer unfit for military service. Not everyone could afford to

purchase these expensive documents. One bochur learned that in Kovno this exemption could be arranged for a bargain price of fifty rubles. The bochur promptly boarded a train headed for Kovno. En route, he discovered that the gadol hador, R' Chaim Brisker, was his traveling companion. He quickly went to take advantage of the opportunity and say "Shalom Aleichem" to this Torah giant. R' Chaim Brisker, however, wasn't satisfied with just a greeting. He inquired as to the reason for the trip and after the bochur's general welfare. The bochur informed R' Chaim of his plans, and R' Chaim offered his assistance should it be required. The boy thanked the gadol, but assured him that all would go well.

Unfortunately, a complication arose when the bochur was informed that the price had risen and was now 200 rubles! In despair, the bochur decided to seek R' Chaim. He learned that R' Chaim was in the midst of an important Vaad Harabonim meeting concerning pressing issues in Klal Yisroel. The bochur attempted to enter the residence where the meeting was taking place, but a guard barred his entrance. A dispute between the two ensued, and their voices were loud enough to disturb the meeting. A Rav exited the meeting seeking the source of the commotion. The bochur told him that he had an appointment with the Brisker Rav. R' Chaim quickly emerged and assured the guard that he indeed had an appointment. After hearing the bochur's dilemma, R' Chaim asked the Rabbonim present to contribute to the cause. They answered his appeal and raised a sum of 150 rubles. As the grateful bochur departed, he overheard one Rav comment: "Brisker Rav, I recognize the virtue in helping a bochur in need, yet I wonder if meeting the needs of one bochur justified interrupting efforts on behalf of the entire Klal Yisroel?!" Upon hearing this concern, R' Chaim banged on the table with a force that shook the walls and proclaimed: "One bochur is Klal Yisroel!"

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# HALACHA ENCOUNTERS

## *Amein* Part two

Rabbi Yisroel Langer

The gemorah in Berachos (47a) says that it is forbidden to answer an *Amein yesoma* ("orphaned *amein*"). The meforshim explain an *Amein yesoma* as one who answers *amein* to a bracha that he did not hear. The rishonim ask a question based on a gemorah in Succah that seems to contradict this. The gemorah discusses a shul in Alexandria, Egypt, that had a very large minyan. It was so large that people towards the back of the shul could not hear the chazzan. In order for them to be able to respond *amein* to the chazan's brachos, handkerchiefs were raised high into the air to indicate when the chazzan finished the brachos. From this gemorah it would seem that one **could** answer *amein* to a bracha that he did not hear. There are two answers given by the rishonim to answer this contradiction. Some rishonim (Rambam, R' Yonah, Rabbeinu Nissim Gaon) answer, that the prohibition of saying an *amein yesoma* is only when one is obligated to recite a bracha, and he mistakenly thinks that he could fulfill this obligation by responding *amein* to his friend's bracha, even without hearing the entire bracha. However, by the shul in Alexandria, the congregants were not obligated in any of the brachos that they were responding to. Other rishonim (Rashi, Tosfos) give a different answer. The gemorah in Berachos that says it's forbidden to answer an *amein yesoma* is discussing not only a situation where you can't hear the bracha, but a circumstance when you don't even know what bracha is being said. In the shul of Alexandria, although they couldn't hear the bracha, they knew which bracha they were answering *amein* to. In this situation it is permitted to say *amein*. Both of those opinions are mentioned in Shulchan Aruch (O.C. 124:8), and we are *machmir* (strict) like both.

The above halacha is very relevant to us especially during *Chazaras Hashatz*. If one is looking in a sefer (see Elya Zuta 124:2) or day dreaming during *Chazaras Hashatz* and is unaware of which bracha he is answering *amein* to, not only does he not get a mitzvah, but he has transgressed by reciting an *amein yesoma*. (sefer Charedim ch.37:2) (This is certainly an *amein yesoma* according to Rashi and Tosfos. See M.B. 124 sk33 who quotes acharonim that by *Chazaras Hashatz* all the rishonim agree that it's an *amein yesoma*.)

Another application of this halacha is responding *amein* to a bracha heard via a microphone, telephone, or live video hookup. According to Hagaon R' Shlomo Zalman Auerbach zt"l (Minchos Shlomo siman 9) and most poskim, the sound that

comes via a microphone, telephone, radio etc. is not considered to be the voice of a human. Accordingly, a bracha heard via a microphone would have the same status as a bracha made in the shul of Alexandria, in which one knows what bracha was said, but halachically is not considered as if he heard the bracha. Therefore, one would not be able to fulfill any of his obligations through hearing the "voice" coming from a microphone or telephone (ex. Havdalah or megillah), and if he mistakenly tries to, his *amein* would be an *amein yesoma*. (Note: This is the opinion of Hagaon R' Shlomo Zalman Auerbach zt"l and most poskim. However, see Igros Moshe O.C.2 siman 108 and Chazon Ish brought by Minchas Shlomo ibid. footnote #4). The questionable case is a situation where one is **not** trying to fulfill any obligations (ex. Havdallah, megillah) via an electrical device. In this case, could he answer *amein*? If the one making the bracha on a microphone is in the same vicinity as those listening to the bracha, this is like the case of Alexandria, and an *amein* would be appropriate. However, if the bracha is being broadcasted from another location (ex. radio, telephone, live video hookup) then the poskim argue. Some poskim (Hagaon R' Avodyah Yoseif Shlita in Yechave Daas volume 2 siman 68) hold that this case is also like the case of Alexandria and an *amein* could be said (provided that there is not time delay in the broadcasting). Other poskim (Hagaon R' Shlomo Zalman Auerbach Zt"l ibid; Be'er Moshe volume 3 siman 166) hold that since the one making the bracha is not in the same vicinity, one would not be allowed to answer *amein*, as the *amein* would be considered an *amein l'vatolah*. (An *amein* not said over any bracha is not permitted, as *amein* has the name of Hashem in it- E-I Melach Ne'eman)

Even according to the poskim that permit an *amein* to be said, one is not obligated to answer *amein*. (The people in Alexandria were not obligated to answer- it was optional.) (See Biur Halacha Siman 215:2, see also Ishei Yisroel C.h.4 note 32), Therefore some say (Harav Dovid Zucker Shlita) that because it's a machlokes haposkim if one could say *amein*, and those who hold you could do not obligate you to do so, it is better to refrain and not say *amein*. (See also Biur Halacha 215:4, that if one is in doubt whether to say *amein* he may be lenient and not say it.)

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