

THE SANCTITY OF THE SYNAGOGUE AND THE AMEN RESPONSE # 5



THE ZOHAR AND THE REWARD FOR ANSWERING AMEN

We have learnt: Greater is he that answers "Amen" than he that says the blessing.' For so we have explained in the presence of R. Shimon, that Amen draws blessings from the Source to the King and from the King to the Matrona; in the inscribed letters of R. Eleazar, from A to M and from M to N, and when the blessings come to N, from there they issue forth to higher and lower and spread through all, and a voice proclaims, "Drink from the stream of blessings that So-and-so the servant of the Holy King has sent forth". And when Israel below are careful to answer "Amen" with fitting devotion, many doors of blessing are opened for them above, many blessings are spread through all worlds, and great is the joy throughout. For this Israel receive a reward in this world and in the next. In this world because when Israel are oppressed and offer up prayer a voice proclaims in all worlds, "Open ye the gates that the righteous nation which keeps truth may enter in" (Isa.26, 2): as Israel open for you gates of blessing, so open the gates for them and let their prayer be received for deliverance from their oppressors. In the next world what is their reward? That when a man who was careful to answer Amen departs from this world, his soul ascends and they proclaim before him: Open the gates before him as he opened gates every day by being careful to answer Amen. But if one hears a blessing from the reader and is not careful to answer Amen, what is his punishment? As he did not open blessings below, so they do not open for him above, and when he leaves this world they proclaim before him: Close the gates in the face of So-and-so that he enter not, and do not receive him-woe to him and to his soul!

THOSE WHO NEGLECT TO ANSWER AMEN ARE TAKEN TO THE LOWEST LEVEL OF GEHINOMM CALLED AVADON (DESTRUCTION)

We have learnt that the sinners of Gehinomm are in different levels, and that Gehinomm has a number of gates corresponding to those of the Garden of Eden, each with its own name. There is one level lower than all the rest which consists of

a level on a level, and this is called the nether Sheol, "sheol" being one level and "nether" another below it. We have learnt that he who descends to Avadon, which is called "nether", never ascends again, and he is called "a man who has been wiped out from all worlds". To this place they take down those who scorn to answer Amen, and for all the amens which they have neglected they are judged in Gehinomm and taken down to that lowest level which has no outlet, and from which they never ascend. Of such it is written, "As the cloud is consumed and withers away, so he that goes down to Sheol shall come up no more" (Job 7, 9); this refers to that nether level.' R. Jose cited the verse: "For my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and have hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water" (Jeremiah). ` "They have forsaken me", by refusing to sanctify the name of the Holy One, blessed be He, with Amen; and their punishment is "to hew out broken cisterns", by being taken down to Gehinomm level after level till they reach Abadon, which is called "nether". But if one sanctifies the name of the Holy One, blessed be He, by answering Amen with all his heart, he ascends grade after grade till he is regaled with that World-to-come which perennially issues forth.

(The Zohar ha Kaddosh V, 285)

MAYBE YOU NEVER HEARD YOUR RABBI TALKING ABOUT THESE THINGS FOR IT MAY NOT BE IN HIS BEST INTEREST TO TELL YOU. SO EVEN IF YOUR RABBI RIDICULES YOU FOR KEEPING THE SHULCHAN ARUCH YOU SHOULD BE STRONG AND GO AHEAD FOR IT MAY BE THAT YOUR RABBI BELONGS TO THE EREV RAV AND HE JUST DOES NOT WANT YOU TO KEEP THE TORAH AS IT SHOULD BE FOR MAYBE HE WOULD BE EXPOSED AS A FAKE IN THE EYES OF THE OTHER CONGREGANTS WHEN THEY SEE THAT A COMMON PERSON KEEPS THE SHULCHAN ARUCH TO A GREATER EXTENT THAN THE RABBI. AND WE ARE NOT TALKING ABOUT PIOUS PRACTICES BUT WE ARE TALKING HERE ABOUT KEEPING THE SHULCHAN ARUCH, ESPECIFICALLY CONCERNING THOSE AREAS WHERE THE RELIGIOUS LEADERS OF OUR TIME ARE LAX ABOUT. FOR EXAMPLE, TALKING IN THE SYNAGOGUE IN THE MIDDLE OF PRAYERS, DURING THE KADDISH, GIVING TORAH LESSONS TO MEN AND WOMEN WITHOUT A MECHITZA, HAVING A DEFICIENT MECHITZA IN SHUL, LOOKING AT WOMEN WHICH IS SOMETHING FORBIDDEN, ETC