

The *gemara* at the end of the this week’s *amud* mentions a very interesting *halacha*. We know that when someone hears a *bracha* they are supposed to respond with an *amen*, proclaiming that they agree with and believe in, the praise that was offered to Hashem. That being said, what would the rule be about saying *amen* to your own *bracha*? The *gemara* teaches us that it is inappropriate because you are conveying a message that there was insufficient praise for Hashem in the actual *bracha* and it needs to be supplemented with an additional *amen* to complete the praise. Therefore, the *halacha* follows that only if you hear someone else make a *bracha* should you respond with an *amen* but not to your own *bracha*. However, like any good rule, there is an exception. According to *Tosfos*’s interpretation of our *gemara*, the only time that one should say *amen* to their own *bracha* is after the third *bracha* of bentching, *boneh brachamav yerushalim*.

The final words on the *amud* state that R’ Ashi had the custom of saying this *amen* after *boneh brachamav yerushalim* quietly so as not to disgrace the rest of bentching. The *amen* signifies that the person saying the blessing has completed their thanks and praise of Hashem but, in reality, there is still another rabbinic *bracha* to go, *hatov v’hamativ*. In order to not make it seem like we do not need the rabbinic addition, he only said *amen* in an undertone. This is a unique practice that does not appear often in Judaism; the requirement to whisper a phrase instead of saying it out loud. Another famous example is *baroch shem k’vod malchuso leolam voed* after the first sentence of *Shema*. What is the connection between these two whisperings and can this shed light on the mysterious whispered *amen* after the third *bracha* of bentching?

In *pesachim* (56a), the *gemara* tells us that when our forefather Yaakov’s life was coming to an end, he gathered his sons, the tribes, together to reveal to them the exact time the world will reach its completion and Hashem will reveal Himself clearly to the world. Yaakov promptly forgot the date and was concerned that the reason for his unusual spell of memory loss was due to the fact that one of his sons was not worthy of hearing this piece of information. He questioned them and they responded in unison, “*Shema Yisrael Hashem etc*”. Yaakov realized that there must be a different reason that Hashem was not allowing him to share but was relieved that his children were all technically worthy of hearing it. He responded, “*Baruch shem etc*”. We would really say it in our *shema* just like him, but since they do not appear in the *Torah*, we cannot say them out loud, hence the whisper.

The Merriam-Webster definition of a whisper is, “to speak softly with little or no vibration of the vocal cords”. When we wish to express ourselves through speech, our airflow pushes through the folds of membranous tissue that extend from the larynx and causes those tissues, our vocal cords, to vibrate thereby causing a modulation or adjustment of the airflow that produces sounds. This is a detailed and complicated process that requires many parts of the throat and mouth area of the body to work in unison to produce the proper sound. In essence, a whisper skips most of the process. We do not use the normal process used for talking when we whisper. This could be the message hidden in our saying *Baruch Shem* quietly. We wish to convey through our abnormal speech, that just like we are skipping steps in the process of producing sounds, we wish that Hashem will “skip steps” and reveal *shem k’vod malchuso*, His holy name, to the world despite us not fulfilling the appropriate prerequisites to deem us deserving of His presence. Similarly, R’ Ashi finished the third paragraph of bentching, he would whisper his *amen* to his own *bracha*, as if to say, “Hashem please rebuild Yerushalim despite our current undeserving state. May we merit this Purim to see Hashem reveal Himself to the world.