

## **“Almighty Amen”**

*Rabbi Yaakov Berkowitz*

This week we learned (47a) that *Rabba bar bar Channa* taught his son the following halacha. “The person who made the blessing over bread is not permitted to break the bread until the ‘amen’ is concluded from those responding”. *Rashi* (Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki 1040-1105) explains that “amen” is part of the blessing, and cites the gemara from the sixth perek (39b) which states that it is forbidden to “cut the bread” until one concludes his blessing. It therefore follows, that if the amen is considered part of the blessing, that one must wait to cut the bread until the amen is concluded.

Rabbi Yosef Teumim (18th century) in his monumental work on *Shulchan Aruch*, “*Pri Megadim*”, questions whether this law would apply specifically in an instance where the one making the blessing is being *motzei*, enabling the other person to eat bread, with his hearing of the blessing and answering amen to it. Or, perhaps this is true even in a case where the person responding amen is merely a bystander.

Rabbi Teumim concludes by quoting the *Shulchan Aruch* regarding the laws of the priestly blessings (*Orach Chaim* 128:16) that after the kohen recites his blessing prior to saying the actual Torah blessing verse’s, the kohen is not allowed to begin the actual blessing until (most of) the congregation completes their amen. From there the *Pri Megadim* proves that even in an instance where the listener is not fulfilling any blessing obligation the one saying the blessing must nevertheless wait until after amen is said, as that is the end of the blessing.

Rabbi Akiva Eiger (1761-1837) takes this one step further. The halacha is, as we also learned in this week’s *amud*, that one is only permitted to respond amen on a bracha immediately following the recitation of the bracha. However, Rabbi Akiva Eiger suggests that if one heard the congregation saying amen it is still considered “immediately following the bracha” and can likewise say amen. The rationale for this is, as above, because actually the bracha is not completely finished until after the recital of amen.

A bracha with amen being said on it is not merely something nice, the amen actually accomplishes something tremendous. On Friday night’s we say as a congregation, and minimally with another person, the verses from Genesis which recount how G-d completed creation and rested on the seventh day. The reason we need to say it with someone else, and not alone, is because the Torah mandates that two witnesses are necessary for testifying in court and, similarly, when we say these verses we are “testifying” to G-d being the creator. This is, explains Rabeinu Bachya (1255-1340) what happens when someone responds amen to our blessing. It has created a situation where there are now two people, witnesses of sorts, are testifying about G-d, and that, like the recital of the verses Friday night, is not something to be taken lightly.

This is a tremendous inspiration for something which sometimes gets overlooked. A quiet bracha will never reach the level of getting “to the top” and leaving someone else’s bracha hanging, without saying amen and joining him in recognizing G-d as the creator, is a terrible lost opportunity. We should all merit to see the day when the entire world recognizes Hashem as the creator of the world, speedily in our days.