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By Hamodia Staff

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A look at some popular *segulos* and their sources

Throughout our long years of exile, Jews have constantly faced challenge and adversity. We have responded by reciting *Tehillim* and pouring out our hearts to the *Ribbono Shel Olam*, as well as beseeching *tzaddikim* to *daven* on our behalf.

Nowadays, newspapers are filled with notices by anonymous readers declaring, "I lit a candle ... for forty days, and I was helped with..." Segulos are not something new; they are discussed at length in *Chazal,* and there are numerous historical anecdotes about people who were helped after performing various *segulos*. Yet it is only fairly recently that a wide range of *segulos* has become so popular with the masses.

In our quest for *yeshuos,* are we substituting *segulos* for *tefillah*? Are we lighting candles instead of turning to Hashem? Have we strayed from the well-beaten and much tested path of our ancestors in favor of easier and more exotic resources? In researching the subject, we found that some of these popular *segulos* have reliable sources, while others have no known source at all. But even in regard to the most authentic and reliable *segulos*, there is a danger of their being taken out of proportion. At best, a *segulah* may serve as a secondary accompaniment for our primary obligation to pour out our hearts in *tefillah* to the *Ribbono shel Olam* and to be as generous as possible in giving *tzedakah.*

Are *Segulos* Appropriate?

Numerous prominent Rabbanim were contacted to share their opinion on this delicate subject. The vast majority declined to give statements and chose to neither endorse nor reject these practices. In accompanying sidebars, we present statements from some Rabbanim.

The following are some well-known forty-day *segulos*:

- Saying *Shir Hashirim*
- Saying *Perek Shirah*
- *Davening* at the Kosel
- Designating a special time to be more stringent with *Shmiras halashon*
- Completing *Tehillim,* individually or as part of a group (*Tehillim mechulak*)
- Saying *pesukim* of *Tehillim* that begin with the letters of the name of the person needing the *yeshuah* (*Tehillim HaChida*)
- Lighting a candle *l'iluy nishmas* the Rebbe, Harav Mendel of Riminov, *zt"l*
- Reciting *Nishmas*
- Separating *challah* for forty consecutive weeks (on Erev Shabbos)

Forty Days

The concept of a forty-day cycle is not something new. The Karliner Rebbe, *zt"l*, in his *sefer Beis Aharon* (*Parashas Noach*), comments on the *passuk, "Vayehi mikeitz arba'im yom vayiftach Noach es chalon hateivah asher asa."* He says that after Noach had been in the ark for forty days, Hashem opened the window of the ark and listened to Noach's prayers. It says in the *Zohar* that a person who prays for forty days will surely be helped.

In *Midrash Rabbah* (*Parashas Va'Eschanan*) it says: "The Rabbanim said that there is a prayer that is answered after forty days. We learn this from Moshe Rabbeinu, who said, "*Va'esnapal lifnei Hashem karishona arba'im yom ve'arba'im laylah."*

It says in *Sifrei*, "Rabi Eliezer's students asked him how long a person should pray for a specific thing. He answered, 'Not more than Moshe, not more than forty days.'"

However, according to Rabbi Levi Freund, *shlita, mechaber* of the *sefer Segulos Habaal Shem Tov Vetalmidav,* for only two of these *segulos* — *Shir Hashirim* and *davening* at the Kosel — does there seem to be any source for doing so for forty days in particular.

In a similar vein, the Rebbe, Reb Elimelech of Lizensk, *zt"l*, wrote in his *Tzetil Kattan* that it takes forty days for a person to completely change a habit.

Publicizing the Segulah

As mentioned, one extremely popular part of these *segulos* is to place either an advertisement or letter to the editor in a newspaper or magazine stating, "I lit a candle *l'iluy nishmas* the Rebbe, Harav Mendel of Riminov, and I was helped with ..." whatever *nisayon* the person had been dealing with.

Hamodia is continuously inundated with letters of this kind.

The senders doubtlessly mean well, but there does not seem to be any source — reliable or otherwise — for their actions.

While the concept of publicly expressing gratitude to Hashem is always appropriate, there does not seem to be any reason to publicize the fact that a *segulah* was performed.

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Let's take a closer look at some segulos:

Shir Hashirim

The basic *segulah* of someone in the need of a *yeshuah* saying *Shir Hashirim* (not necessarily for forty days) is mentioned in *Sichos HaRan*. Harav Nachman of Breslav, *zt"l*, advised someone who had an ill family member that he should rise before dawn and say all of *Shir Hashirim*. The ill person recovered.

A *segulah* of reciting *Shir Hashirim* for forty days has become very popular among people looking for a *shidduch*. The first known source for this particular *segulah* is a recent one.

Hagaon Harav Dovid Jungreis, *zt"l*, Rosh Av Beis Din of the Eidah Charedis of Yerushalayim (1898-1972), wrote: "He or she, or one of the parents, should say *Shir Hashirim* with much *kavanah*. They should also say the *Ribbon Kol Ha'olamim*, which can be found in the *siddur*, and spell out their request, along with the person's name and his or her mother's name. They should give *tzedakah* for Rabi Meir Baal Hanes and light a candle *l'iluy nishmaso*. All this should be done for forty consecutive days, and they will surely be helped from Above."

It is important to note that there are three parts to this *segulah:* the saying of *Shir Hashirim,* the giving of *tzedakah*, and the lighting of a candle *l'iluy nishmas* Rabi Meir Baal Hanes. Most importantly, it also includes the saying of a *tefilah* to the *Ribbono shel Olam.*

Rabbi Freund writes that he heard from many sources about some *bachurim* who had not been able to find *shidduchim*. After saying *Shir Hashirim* and lighting a candle for forty days (they used a *neshamah* candle, and always lit a new one before the old one had gone out), they merited *yeshuos*.

Shemiras Halashon

A new *segulah* for childless couples has become popular. A group of friends or relatives choose a day or days during which they undertake to be vigilant in *shemiras halashon*. In the *sefer Venifl'osav Livnei Adam*, the author writes that he has not been successful in tracing the origin of this *segulah*.

Tehillim HaChida

Originally, this was known as *Likutei Tehillim*. However, since the Chida mentioned this *segulah* several times in his *sefarim*, it has become known as *Tehillim HaChida*.

The Chida writes in his *sefer Yosef Tehillos* that when someone is ill, *R"l*, Yidden should say ten *pesukim* of *Tehillim* that start with the letters of the ill person's name. This *segulah* is also referred to in many other *sefarim*.

Rabbi Freund wrote about a couple who had been married for ten years, but had no children. When the woman recited *Tehillim HaChida* for forty days, the couple was helped.

Tehillim HaChida is usually said over a period of forty days, using the names of the people in need of a *yeshuah* and the names of their mothers.

The Ungvarer Rebbe, Harav Menashe Klein, *shlita*:

What can I say? The topic of *segulos* is an inexhaustible one. There may be *segulos* that are done with *ehrliche* intentions. But in today's world, so many are discontent with what they have that they go looking [in] other places to fill their voids. One travels to Lizhensk, another goes to the burial place of the Baal Shem Tov... These things are all fine, but sitting and learning a *blatt Gemara* or *Shulchan Aruch* is the biggest *segulah*. There is no greater *segulah* than Torah, as *Chazal* tell us, "*Chash berosho yaasok beTorah*."

A variation of this *segulah* can be found in the *sefer Kitzur HaShlah*. The author writes: "I heard about a wise man in Poland who once saw great trouble befall his city and ordered the residents to say the *pessukim* of *Tehillim* that begin with the letters of the name of that city. He told the people that he had learned the *segulah* from a great *mekubal*, and that it was very effective against all kinds of problems."

Perek Shirah

This *segulah* has become very popular recently, especially among women. In truth, the *segulah* of saying *Perek Shirah* is very old. Chazal say, "*Kol ha'omer Perek Shirah bechol yom muvtach lo shehu ben Olam Habba*."

It is interesting to note that in the *sefer Ha'ikarim*, it says, regarding the aforementioned *Chazal*, that one's reading of *Perek Shirah* should not be superficial. Rather, as one recites the *Perek Shira*, one should ponder the nature of animals and the positive qualities that can be learned from each of them.

However, as mentioned, there does not seem to be any known source for saying *Perek Shirah* for forty days per se.

Davening at the Kosel

Davening at the Kosel for forty consecutive days is a well-known *segulah* that is accepted among elderly *Yerushalmis*. This *segulah* is mentioned in the *sefer Tzaddik Yesod Olam*, where the following story is told:

A couple once visited the Zhviller Rebbe, Harav Shlomo, *zy"a*, and asked for a blessing for their four-year-old daughter, an intelligent child who was, for the most part, physically strong and healthy, but wasn't able to walk. The couple had seen many doctors, but to no avail.

The Zhviller Rebbe told the mother to pray at the Kosel for forty days. When the mother told him that it was extremely difficult for her, as the mother of a large family, to go to the Kosel for forty days in a row, the Rebbe told her that he would go in her place. For forty days, the Rebbe went to the Kosel. On the fortieth day, the mother called to tell him that her daughter had miraculously stood up and run to her. She was now walking as if nothing had ever been amiss.

There is an interesting *teshuvah* in the *sefer Teshuvos Vehanhagos* by Hagaon Harav Moshe Sternbuch, *shlita*. Harav Sternbuch writes about a woman who was childless for many years and who, as a last resort, began going to the Kosel every day. She questioned whether she was she allowed to light the Shabbos candles early, take a car to the Kosel, and then walk home on foot (having had in mind during candle-lighting that she would still be doing one *melachah* afterward), since she lived far away from the Kosel. Harav Sternbuch's response was that she was allowed to do this, but added that he believed that if she went to the Kosel on *Motzaei Shabbos*, it would be just as if she had gone on Shabbos. He then expounded on the topic, writing that in Yerushalayim, the *segulah* works at the Kosel, but in other cities in Eretz Yisrael, as well as in *Chutz La'Aretz*, going to the same *beis medrash* for forty consecutive days and making a special request is equally effective. He added that a person could give eighteen cents to charity in that place for those who learn Torah diligently and say, as he gave the money, "I am coming here for forty days to ask for ... " and he would merit a *yeshuah*.

The Mezhbuzher Rav, Harav Avraham Yehoshua Heshel Bick, *shlita*:

[*Segulos*] are nothing more than *bubbe maasos*, *eitzas yetzer hara* that give people a license to spend money way beyond their means and then ask for a *yeshuah*. All these formulae — saying *Shir Hashirim* forty times, *Tehillim HaChida*, etc. — are methods used by the *yetzer hara* to take from us the little [spirituality] we have left.

Prayer, on the other hand, is not a *segulah*; prayer is a way of communicating with the *Ribbono shel Olam*. When we use *segulos* to get what we want, it's as if we are stealing something from Him, something that is not rightfully ours. It reminds me of today's Chinese auctions at charitable events. Whereas women used to give charity without ulterior motives, they have now replaced their *mitzvos* with Chinese auctions.

Separating Challah

Rabbeinu Bechaye writes that a *tefillah* that is said during the performance of a *mitzvah* has special meaning. Saying a special while separating *challah* is an accepted and widely practiced *segulah*. When doing the mitzvah of *challah*, many women add a special *"Yehi Ratzon"* and mention the names of women who are in need of a *yeshuah*. Harav Freund maintains that many people have been helped with this *segulah*.

Lighting Candles Liluy Nishmas Harav Menachem Mendel of Riminov, zt"l

This *segulah* is brought down in the *sefer Yalkut Menachem*. The author writes: "Regarding the custom of lighting a candle on the *yahrtzeit* (19 Iyar) of Rebbe Menachem Mendel of Riminov, *zy"a*, I