

Tefillah Focus Of The Week:

ברכת קריאת שמע: אהבה רבה (אהבת עולם)

The Ultimate Gift of Love

MEANING: The simple translation of the prayer

With abundant love (an eternal love) You have loved us, Hashem, our G-d, with exceedingly great pity have You pitied us... instill in our hearts... to learn, teach... and fulfill all the words of Your Torah's teaching with love...

אהבה רבה (אהבת עולם)
אהבתנו ה' אלקינו, חמלה גדולה
ויתרה חמלת עלינו... ותן בלבנו...
ללמוד וללמד... ולקים את
כל דברי תלמוד תורתך
באהבה...

WORD TO THE WISE: Meaning within the word



Which feeling of closeness is greater? Is it אהבה, love, or חמלה, pity? The word חמלה connotes that Hashem had pity on the Jewish people, which occurred after they sinned with the Golden Calf. Arousing Hashem's אהבה, love, however, does not require any outside stimuli. Thus, אהבה appears to be greater than חמלה.

In that case, it would seem that the prayer should begin with the lesser feeling of closeness and then build to the purer and stronger

feeling of אהבה. The Alter from Slabodka (Ohr HaTzafon) explains that there is a lesson in the order of the words: notwithstanding the fact that the Jewish people may not have deserved Hashem's pity, it arises from His great אהבה for the Jewish people. His love for us is so great that He is (as it were) "distressed" that, as a result of the sin of the Golden Calf, He cannot grant us the maximum measure of His goodness. Therefore Hashem's חמלה גדולה - His exceedingly great pity -- is an outgrowth of His love, אהבתנו.

THEME:

An essential concept of the prayer

The Gift of Torah

Hashem's giving of the Torah to the Jewish people is a manifestation of His love for us.

INSIGHT:

Deeper meanings of the theme

More Precious

In the first blessing before Shema, יצר we blessed G-d for having created the luminaries. Now we turn to an even greater light than that of the brightest stars and the sun. That is the light of Torah. In this second blessing before Shema, we thank Hashem for the Torah and pray that He grant us the wisdom to understand His Torah properly (Ya'avetz).

There is a story told about Rav Gifter (Rosh Yeshiva of Telz Yeshiva in Cleveland) on one of his fundraising trips on behalf of his Yeshiva. One of the yeshiva's supporters who he went to visit was a diamond merchant on 47th Street in Manhattan. This person dealt with tiny stones called baguettes, which were used to surround the larger stone on a diamond ring. These baguettes were so tiny that 400 of them weighed 1 carat. They had to be cut, polished and weighed under a microscope.

The supporter gave Rav Gifter a donation to the Yeshiva. When Rav Gifter was about to leave, the

supporter commented, "I noticed how the Rosh Yeshiva was looking at the workers who were cutting, polishing and weighing the baguettes under a microscope. It's so easy to lose these precious stones and if you lose even one, it's an expensive loss. Could you imagine how careful the workers must be -- what it means to lose many of these little precious stones?"

Rav Gifter responded, "When I was looking at your workers and seeing how careful they were with those tiny stones, I was thinking of the verses Dovid Hamelech wrote: "The Torah of Hashem is perfect, it restores the soul" (Tehillim 19:8). "The words of Torah are more desirable than gold or an abundance of precious gems" (Ibid, 19:11). Rav Gifter said, "your workers treat the precious stones with such great care. The smallest stone is invaluable, and people treat it that way. However, Torah is even more valuable than these tiny precious stones."

VISUALIZE:

Images that bring the prayer to life

A Gift of Love

Locked in a vault, hidden away from the rest of the world, there is a formula for the elixir of perfect happiness. The formula is passed down from teacher to student, and the teacher must select that student carefully. It must be someone who will use the knowledge



well, for good purposes. It must be someone who will guard the knowledge and be sure to pass it on to the next generation in its turn. Yet once that student is chosen, he is set for life with a perfect method of living with

joy and contentment. Obviously, the teacher would only pass the formula on to someone for whom he felt profound love.

Likewise, Hashem chose the Jewish people as His students for the Torah, the formula for perfect happiness. One who follows its precepts lives a life of purpose, meaning and enlightenment. Such a gift is certain proof of Hashem's profound love for us.

Try This!

► Think of a few of the wonderful mitzvos Torah has brought into your life – for instance, your Shabbos table, a Yom Tov mitzvah you particularly enjoy, your children studying Torah in a yeshiva, the loving kindness that abounds in your community. Vividly imagine life without those things. When you feel what you would be missing without the Torah, capture that feeling and inject it into the words of this blessing: ... ללמוד וללמד... ולקים את כל דברי תלמוד תורתך באהבה...

Did You Know

► Defining Hashem's Love

There is a Talmudic dispute (Berachos 11b) as to whether the proper text in this prayer is אהבת עולם, an eternal love, or אהבת רבה, an abundant love. Nusach Sefard follows the ruling of the Rif, Rambam, and others that the halachic text is אהבת עולם at all times. Another opinion is that אהבת עולם is recited at all times except during Shacharis of Shabbos when אהבת רבה is recited (Shaarei Teshuva, Siman 60:1). Nusach Ashkenaz accommodates both views by reciting אהבת רבה in the morning and אהבת עולם in the evening prayer (Mishneh Berurah, Siman 60:2).

The reason that we say אהבת רבה in the morning is that it is written (Eicha 3.23) "Chadashim l'bkarim rabba emunasecha" - "They are new every morning, great is Your faithfulness." The words אהבת רבה recognize G-d's great love manifested by His recreating us each morning.