

Tefillah Focus Of The Week:

ברכת קריאת שמע: אהבה רבה (אהבת עולם)

A Bond of Love

MEANING: The simple translation of the prayer

...For You effect salvations, O G-d; You have chosen us from among every people and tongue... Blessed are You, Hashem, Who chooses His people Israel with love.

...כי א-ל פועל ישועות אתה,
ובנו בחרת מכל עם ולשון...
ברוך אתה ה', הבוחר בעמו
ישראל באהבה.

WORD TO THE WISE: Meaning within the word



In this part of the prayer we acknowledge that ובנו בחרת מכל עם ולשון, You [Hashem] chose us from among every people and tongue. Before Moshe Rabbeinu died, he praised G-d and recalled the merit that makes Israel worthy of His blessing. As the Torah (Devarim 33:2) notes,

“...Hashem came from Sinai—having shone forth to them from Seir, having appeared from Mount Paran, and then approached with some of the holy myriads—from His right hand He presented the fiery Torah to them.”

The Midrash (*Sifre, ibid.*) tells us that G-d offered the Torah to the descendants of Esav, אדום who dwelled in *Seir*, and to ישמעאל, the Ishmaelites, who dwelled in *Paran*. Both of them refused to accept the Torah because it prohibited them from killing and stealing. Then, accompanied by some of His myriads of holy angels, G-d came and offered His Torah to the Jewish people, who submitted themselves to His sovereignty and accepted His Torah. This sequence is alluded to in a *gematria* (numerical equivalent): the words עם ולשון are 502 (110+392= 502), which is equal to ישמעאל plus אדום (451+51=502) (*Parparaos L'Chochmah*).

THEME:

An essential concept of the prayer

Chosen With Love

Because of the mutual love between Hashem and the Jewish people, He chose us to receive His Torah, and we chose to accept it.

INSIGHT:

Deeper meanings of the theme

A Father's Love

Before accepting upon ourselves G-d's absolute sovereignty in *Shema*, we end the blessing that precedes it by acknowledging Hashem's love for the Jewish people, in the blessing ברוך אתה ה' הבוחר בעמו ישראל באהבה, *Blessed are You, Hashem, Who chooses His people Israel with love*. It is the most powerful unconditional love, that of a father for his child.

When the Jewish people became a nation, the Torah (Shemos 4:22) declared, “So said Hashem, ‘My firstborn son is Israel.’” Just as a firstborn son has a special place in his parents' heart, so too the Jewish people are Hashem's beloved people. The knowledge of this most powerful love enables us to accept upon ourselves G-d's absolute sovereignty in the *Shema*.

Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz (Reb Chaim's Discourses, page 27) once told his students that he would often say a tefillah when he went to visit the Yad Avshalom, the monument of Avshalom, the rebellious son of King David. One of his students asked: “Wasn't Avshalom evil? Why daven at his monument?” Rav Chaim answered with the story of King David

who, upon hearing of his son Avshalom's death, ascended to the upper portion of the chamber of his palace and cried. As he reached the top he cried out, “my son,” eight times. Each of the first seven cries brought Avshalom out from the seven chambers of Gehenom while the last cry of “my son” brought Avshalom to the World to Come (*Sotah 10b*).

Why did King David cry on behalf of Avshalom, the person who threatened his life and his throne? The answer is, no matter how a child behaves towards his father, a loving father's heart feels his child's suffering.

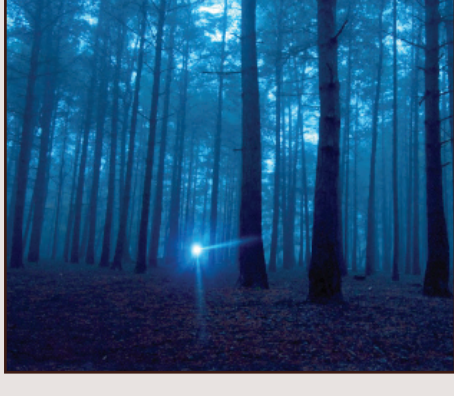
Reb Chaim continued: “Contemplate Avshalom—he tried to kill his father Dovid Hamelech, and yet when Avshalom died, his father was broken-hearted and prayed for him. When I go to Yad Avshalom and I pray there, this helps me understand what is meant by a “loving father's mercy” and then I'm ready to pray to Hashem...to ask anything of Hashem. As a loving father has mercy on his son, so will Hashem have mercy on all of us.

VISUALIZE:

Images that bring the prayer to life

Searching for Us

A child goes for a walk with his father in the forest. He wanders away from his father and suddenly realizes that he is lost and alone. As he searches for his loving father, he encounters wild animals and strange noises. He becomes more terrified by the moment. But as night begins to fall and panic begins to overwhelm



him, he notices the form of his father in the distance, heading toward him. The wild animals and dangers are still all around him, but with the sight of his father's approach, he is instantly comforted.

Similarly, we face many dangerous situations and

difficulties in our lives. When periods of darkness set in, we too may become full of fear. However, even in our most trying and dangerous situation, we need not fear because we know that we are not alone—rather our loving Father in Heaven is always with us.

This beautiful parable crystallizes the nature of our relationship with Hashem (*Machsheves Zekeimim*, page 125).

Try This!

There are nearly 7 billion people in the world. Imagine that mass of humanity, and how tiny a speck Klal Yisrael would be within that mass. Now imagine a thin beam of unimaginably powerful *kedusha* emanating from Heaven, shining down on that one tiny pin-point of a nation, and radiating out from there to all the people of the world. That is what it means to be the nation chosen by Hashem to receive the Torah. Think of that image when saying the words הבוחר בעמו ישראל באהבה.

Did You Know

Essential Kavannah

When reciting *Shema*, there are a few types of *kavannah* required. First, a person must have in mind that he is about to fulfill the Torah commandment to recite *Shema*. However, a leniency exists. If the context is such that it is obvious that this intent is present (e.g. he recited *Shema* during *Shacharis* with the blessings), even though he did not have specific intent, he need not repeat the *Shema* (*Mishneh Berurah 60:10*). A second *kavannah* is to accept the yoke of Hashem's sovereignty (*Kabalas Ol Malchus Shamayim*), and in this *kavannah*, context is not enough. One must actively have intent to accept the yoke of Divine Kingship. Finally, *l'chatchillah*, as a person pronounces the words, he must understand their basic meaning (*Mishneh Berurah 61:1,4,5*).

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