

## Tefillah Focus Of The Week:

### שמע


#### Choosing Blessing

**MEANING:** The simple translation of the prayer

I will provide rain for your land in its proper time... and you will eat and be satisfied. Beware lest your heart be seduced and you turn astray... then the wrath of Hashem will blaze against you....

ונתתי מטר ארצכם  
בעתו... ואכלת ושבעת.  
השמרו לכם פן יפתה  
לבבכם וסרתם...  
וחרה אף ה' בכם...

**WORD TO THE WISE:** Meaning within the word



This prayer recounts Hashem saying: "ונתתי מטר ארצכם בעתו provide rain for your land in its proper time." The Gemara (Taanis 2a) tells us that three "keys" remain in Hashem's hand. In other words, there are three issues over which Hashem alone retains control and does not "delegate" to an agent permanently. They are the "key" of rain, the "key" of birth, and the "key" of the resurrection of the dead. The common factor between these three "keys" is that they each represent the "keys" of life and death. Human birth and the resurrection of the dead are quite obviously issues of giving or creating new life. Rain also shares this central feature in that rain gives life to the natural world. Ben Yehoyada (ibid) explains that the "keys" refer to the power given by Hashem to "nature"

to sustain this world. However, these three -- rain, birth and the resurrection of the dead -- defy nature. The process of conception and birth are not set functions which can always be predicted in advance. It is impossible for the dead to be resurrected. Similarly, the occurrence of rainfall follows no general predictable laws.

The unpredictability of the weather is one of the biggest challenges faced by farmers and scientists alike. People who get paid to predict the weather often get it wrong. Predicting rain is unlike predicting the sunrise and sunset or the motion of the planets and celestial bodies, which can be calculated many years in advance. In this regard, "rainfall" is supernatural and clearly demonstrates Hashem's active involvement in the world.

### THEME:

An essential concept of the prayer

#### How Hashem Runs the World

Performing Hashem's mitzvos brings blessing into the world, and defying Hashem's will brings suffering.

### INSIGHT:

Deeper meanings of the theme

#### Cause and Effect

The essential message of this segment of *Shema*, "השמרו לכם פן יפתה לבבכם וסרתם... בכם", "beware lest your heart be seduced and you turn astray... then the wrath of Hashem will blaze against you," is that if we transgress Hashem's mitzvos, we will suffer and be exiled. Alternatively, if we keep Hashem's laws, we will be given blessings and bounty. This is a description of spiritual cause and effect. Just as we understand that the act of driving a car at full speed into a wall will cause extensive damage to the car, we know that the natural consequence of our sins is suffering.

Our physical reality is not just a function of "nature." Rather, it is a manifestation of our performance of mitzvos and the transgressions of sins. The Midrash (*Eichah Rabbosai* 1:33) teaches that the natural consequence of sin is that

it destroys, as the verse (Tehillim 60:14) states: "When Israel does the will of G-d they add strength above." When the Jewish people disobey G-d, they weaken their link with Heavenly strength and protection. This is expressed in Devarim (32:18, 20): "You ignored the Rock Who gave birth to you and forgot G-d Who brought you forth." "And He [Hashem] will say, I shall hide My face from them and see what their end will be."

Zohar states that the sins of mankind cause imperfections in the "worlds" above. As the Nefesh HaChaim (Shaar 1:3) teaches, G-d "mirrors" us. If we do Hashem's will then He reflects that back to us with blessings and bounty. Likewise, if we do not, then Heaven mirrors back to us suffering and exile.

### VISUALIZE:

Images that bring the prayer to life

#### Gumming Up the Works

Fred owns a small commercial bakery. He operates a huge machine, which, when properly used, flawlessly turns a mixture of ingredients into a perfect batter. The batter then shoots out in perfect orbs on a conveyor belt that runs through a giant oven. Evenly browned, perfectly crisp chocolate chip cookies emerge



on the other side. One day, Fred decided to speed up production by turning the temperature of the oven up two degrees higher than normal. Thousands of cookies emerged too burnt to package and sell.

Could Fred blame the oven for his loss? Obviously not.

Although the oven ruined the cookies, it was Fred's misuse of it that really caused the loss. In the same way, when a Jew sins, he interferes with the proper operation of the world as Hashem has designed it. The blessings that should emerge from Heaven are obstructed. We experience this as "wrath," but in reality, it is the result of our own misuse of the perfect system Hashem designed.

### Try This!

► Often, a person intellectually understands the destructiveness of sin, but has trouble injecting that knowledge into his heart so that he will do what he knows is right. The Torah advises using visual images to help make the mind's ideas real to the heart. That is why the Sages (*Berachos* 57b) use the image of "fire" to describe *Gehinnom*. Anyone who has ever felt the sting of a flame can, with this image, evoke a physical, visceral repulsion to the idea of succumbing to a sin. Think of this image as you say "ונתתי מטר ארצכם... וחרה אף ה' בכם".

### Did You Know

#### ► Word by Word

Every word of *Shema* must be enunciated clearly and uttered with the correct grammatical pronunciation (Orach Chaim, 62:1; 61:3, 16-19). It is especially important to avoid run-on words by pausing briefly between the words that end and begin with the same consonant (e.g. בכם לבבכם). Similarly, one should pause between a word that ends with a consonant and one that begins with a silent letter (ע, א), such as אשר אנכי (Orach Chaim, 61:20, 21). However, if a person recites the *Shema* without paying attention to the accuracy of the pronunciation, he will nevertheless have fulfilled his obligation (Orach Chaim, 62:1).

**Special Note:** We wish everyone a *chag kosher v'sameach*. In this month of Nissan, when we experienced redemption from Egypt, may we merit the final redemption. *B'ezras Hashem*, we will resume publication on Thursday, April 19, *Nissan 27*.

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