Tefillah Focus Of The Week:

שמנה עשרה

Our Eternal Protection

MEANING: The simple translation of the prayer

Blessed are You, Hashem, Shield of Avraham.

ברוך אתה ה', מגן אברהם.



WORD TO THE WISE: Meaning within the word

his part of Shemoneh Esrei refers to when Avraham Avinu conquered the four kings who invaded the Land of Canaan. Hashem

granted Avraham the special protection of a shield, so that even if his enemies shot arrows at him, he would remain unscathed. "Al tirah <mark>Avram. Anochi magen loch</mark>. Secharcha harbei *me'od -- Fear not, Avram, I am your shield. Your* reward (spiritual and material) is exceedingly great," says Hashem (Bereishis 15:1). As Hashem told Avraham, "al tira", do not fear, for you are completely shielded and nothing can penetrate your armor (Michtav M'Eliyahu, Volume 3, page 84).

Yalkut Shimoni (Bereishis 15:1) explains that the

word מגן in Aramaic means, "free." Avraham was concerned that because of his miraculous victory over the four kings, all his merits were consumed. Therefore, Hashem reassured him that, because he fought for Hashem's glory without any concern for personal benefit, his merits would not be diminished at all.

When we call upon Hashem, מגן אברהם the Shield of Avraham, in the beginning of Shemoneh Esrei, we declare that although we are about to make many requests during Shemoneh Esrei, we too desire that our service of G-d be without any concern for personal benefit, and that our merits should not be diminished. (Adapted from Shemoneh Esrei, Rabbi Avrohom Chaim Feuer, Artscroll, Page 64)

THEME: An essential concept of the prayer

The Only Protection

Hashem extends his protection of our forefather Avraham to us, his descendants.

INSIGHT: Deeper meanings of the theme

There for Us

The culmination of the all-important first L blessing in Shemoneh Esrei reminds us that Hashem is a מגן אברהם, He preserves the "spark of Avraham" in each of us. Although each Jew is free to choose between good and evil, Hashem will not allow our holy souls to perish within Furthermore, us (Ohr Gedalyahu, Moadim, p. 29). Hashem is Avinu She'bashamayim—a caring Father in heaven who will never forsake His children and will protect them. This is especially important as we attempt to

maintain our sense of security in a world filled with political volatility and myriad personal tragedies. These mounting troubles may slowly plant seeds of doubt in our confidence of Hashem's protection. How should we, who strive to live with emunah, react in troubled times? The Midrash Rabbah (on Devarim, 2:6), in discussing

the verse (Devarim, 3:23), "Va'eschanan el Hashem ba'eis hahee leimor—I exhorted Hashem at that

hundred

time saying," explains that the word "leimor" means, "say" to the generations that during troubled times they should pray. The Rambam (Taanis 1:1) states, "It is a mitzvah from the Torah to cry out to Hashem for help ... whenever trouble and persecution strike the community." When we pray during troubled times, we confirm our belief that only Hashem can help us. Sometimes, however, a person does not refrain from praying because he lacks confidence in Hashem's power, but rather, because he lacks confidence in his own worthiness. However, as the Sefer Ha'Ikrim (Maamar 4, Chapter 16) explains, Hashem provides for us each day, not due to our righteousness, but rather due to Hashem's benevolence and compassion.

beseech Hashem in prayer. We simply need to gratefully grasp the lifeline He is extending to us, confident that at the other end is the One Power who can save us.

We need not be perfect, or even close to it, to

Images that bring the prayer to life

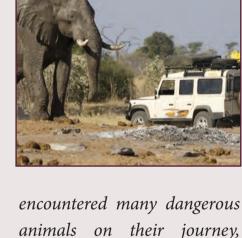
Safe Inside this all-terrain vehicle

VISUALIZE:

percent stable. Its outer shell impermeable. Even elephant couldn't crush Nothing can harm you in there, so don't panic, no matter what you encounter." With that assurance, the Stein family climbed into

one

their vehicle and set out on a fascinating safari through the African jungle. They



they stayed inside their jeep, and drove it properly, nothing could harm them. The troop of chimps that climbed on top and shook the jeep could not tip it. The lions that roamed the open plains couldn't attack them.

but they knew that as long as

them, the mosquitoes couldn't bite them. Often, they became alarmed at the approach of a dangerous animal, but then they remembered that they were inside their jeep, and they were safe. Life is likewise a safari through dangerous territory.

The snakes couldn't harm

We perceive much that has the potential to harm us, but we are shielded by Hashem's constant protection. While unfortunately, there times when we may suffer, we can never be destroyed.

shoots the other soldier. The second soldier is the "cover" for the first. Think about this scenario as it applies to this berachah: we often must go forth into situations that are frightening or confusing. Trepidation is natural. However, Hashem watches over us,

When a soldier goes forth into a dangerous situation, he leaves a

comrade behind, watchfully scanning the scene for any surprise attacker. His job is to shoot down the attacker before the attacker

ready to step in and eliminate that which threatens our progress. He's got us "covered." Keep this image in mind when saying מגן אברהם .

Know

Did You

Reducing the Deficit

As previously explained, the ideal is for a person to concentrate on the meaning of all of the words in Shemoneh Esrei (Orach Chaim, Siman 101:1). At a minimum, he should have *kavannah* during the blessings of the Avos (ibid., Siman 101:1). If he realizes that he did not kavannah during the first berachah of Shemoneh Esrei, he has several options:

at the end of the first berachah, he should return to "Elokai Avraham" and repeat the berachah (Mishnah Berurah, Siman 101:4). * Even if he did not have *kavannah* for the meaning of the words of the first *berachah*, he

*If he realizes that he did not have kavannah before he recited "Baruch Ata Hashem,"

is considered to have recited a proper Shemoneh Esrei provided he thinks of the meaning of the words of the first berachah before he begins saying the next berachah "Ata gibor"

(Sheilos U'Teshuvos Teshuvos V'Hanhagos, 4:28, citing from Rav Chaim Kanievsky in the name of the Chazon Ish). See next week's "Did You Know" for additional solutions.

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