

Tefillah Focus Of The Week:

שמנה עשרה

The Greatest Power of Speech

MEANING: The simple translation of the prayer

Hear our voice, Hashem our G-d, pity and be compassionate to us, and accept—with compassion and favor—our prayer, for G-d Who hears prayers and supplications are You. From before Yourself, our King, turn us not away empty-handed, for You hear the prayer of Your people Israel with compassion. Blessed are You, Hashem, Who hears prayer.

שמע קולנו, ה' אלקינו חוס ורחם עלינו, וקבל ברחמים וברצון את תפלתנו, כי א-ל שומע תפלות ותחנונים אתה, ומלפניך מלכנו, ריקם אל תשיבנו, כי אתה שומע תפלת עמך ישראל ברחמים. ברוך אתה ה', שומע תפלה.

WORD TO THE WISE: Meaning within the word



We proclaim to Hashem, in the present tense, that “You hear the prayer of each mouth of Your people Israel.”

between a person’s power of speech and the power of his prayer.

The *Chidah* explains: If a person is careful with his words, then what “comes from his mouth” — his prayers — “He, [Hashem], shall do.” Care with one’s power of speech is an essential factor in having one’s requests of Hashem granted.

Yet, as we stated in last week’s “Praying With Passion,” it is an undeniable fact played out in Jewish history, as well as in countless personal lives, that sometimes prayer does not bring about the prayed-for salvation. One explanation is based on the verse (*Bamidbar*, 30:3): “He should not profane his word; whatever comes from his mouth he shall do.” The simple meaning of the verse is that one should fulfill his promises. There is another layer of meaning, however, that reveals the intimate relationship

What is the basis of this relationship? Why do sins of speech, such as speaking *lashon hara*, have a specific impact on the ability to be answered from Heaven (*Shmiras Ha'Lashon*, *Sha'ar* 1, *Chapter* 7)? The explanation is not that Hashem is punishing the person for the sin; it is that the person himself, by using his mouth improperly, is tainting the mechanism that produces his prayers.

THEME:

An essential concept of the prayer

The Path to Effective Prayer

Effective prayer depends on maintaining the purity of our mouths, which produce our words of *tefillah*.

INSIGHT:

Deeper meanings of the theme

Pre-empting Hashem

Just as damaging to the efficacy of one’s prayers as speaking *lashon hara*, is talking during the *chazan’s* repetition of the *Shemonah Esrei* — *chazaras hashatz*. Speaking during *chazaras hashatz* is condemned by the *Shulchan Aruch* (*Siman* 124:7) using the harshest language seen in any discussion of transgression. One could almost conclude from this admonition that there is no worse sin:

reflects the message being expressed by the person who is engaged in conversation. He shows his innermost feeling that prayer is meaningless to him, for it is pre-empted by a conversation with his friend.

Such behavior severs the unique bond that prayer forges between man and the Almighty. It is this severed relationship that is “too great to bear,” for who can bear life without a relationship with Hashem? Furthermore, should a personal tragedy impel this person to turn to Hashem in prayer, he will find it difficult to bridge the distance he has created.

The message is that the manner in which a person uses his power of speech can incapacitate the mouth in its most essential task. The message is, however, a comforting one as well, for it tells us we can change our behavior, and make a fresh attempt at beseeching Hashem for our needs.

“One should refrain from speaking profane words during the time the *chazan* repeats *Shemonah Esrei*. And if one spoke, it is a sin, and the sin is too great to bear.”

Why does this sin merit such strong disapproval?

Rav Mattisyahu Salomon, (*Sefer Matnas Chaim*, pages 192-194) explains that the sin of speaking during *chazaras hashatz* is not more egregious than eating on Yom Kippur or desecrating the Sabbath. Rather, the level of condemnation

VISUALIZE:

Images that bring the prayer to life

A Chance to Make Repairs

A doctor performs a delicate, life-saving operation. He works meticulously, expending great effort and care to assure that every step of the procedure is completed perfectly. Although he does everything right, his patient is almost certainly doomed, because the instruments the doctor is using are contaminated. No matter



how lofty the doctor’s intent, and how great his skill, he cannot succeed with unclean tools.

An essential first step in any effort to improve the effectiveness of one’s prayers is to purify the mouth that produces them. When one

prays without apparent result, it is imperative that he examine his habits of speech. Although mastery of this area is an ongoing challenge, one can at least recognize where he has stumbled and concede to himself that his improper speech may be impairing his prayers. He has at his disposal the mighty power of *teshuvah* to help him correct this fatal flaw in his ability to pray effectively, but first, he must identify and resolve to remedy the problem.

Try This!

► When a Jew prays, his own mouth, his words and his breath acquire the power to form and send forth words that reach all the way to Hashem. His words have the power to draw Hashem’s compassion and sustenance into the world. His mouth, which is occupied during most of the day with mundane speech, is empowered to pronounce Hashem’s holy name. Think of the immense spiritual power of the mouth when you say ישראל שומע תפלת עמך ברחמים.

Did You Know

► *The Price of Chatter*

As explained, an essential first step in any effort to improve the effectiveness of one’s prayers is to purify the mouth that produces them. Accordingly, the following is a brief explanation of the halachic prohibitions against conversing during prayer.

For all that shuls and communities have suffered from the grievous habit of conversing during prayer, the individual who does the speaking suffers tremendously as well. He loses his spiritual standing and is identified with the worst of sins.

The *Zohar* (*Parashas Terumah* 131a) identifies a person who speaks about worldly matters in *shul* as a “*kofer b’ikar*,” a heretic. The *Rokeach* (*Sefer Ha'Rokeach*, *Hilchos Teshuvah*, *Siman* 26) adds that one who talks during prayer is guilty of “*masig g’vul*,” stealing the sanctity of the shul.