

Tefillah Focus Of The Week:
BIRCHAS HASHACHAR
INTRODUCTION
From The Senses To The Soul

ברוך אתה ה'
אלקינו מלך העולם אשר נתן
לשכוי בינה להבחין בין יום ובין לילה

Meaning: The simple translation of the prayer

Blessed are You, Hashem, our G-d, King of the universe, Who gave the heart understanding to distinguish between day and night.

Theme: An essential concept of the prayer

To start each day with a reaffirmation of our connection to Hashem.

Insight: Deeper meanings of the theme

By starting our day with the *birchas ha'Shachar*, we embrace anew the world we live in, and recognize each component of it as a new gift from G-d. The *Mishneh Berurah* states that Chazal formulated these blessings to be said prior to each step of our personal re-entry into the living, active world.

One of the most notable aspects of these blessings is that they are said upon the most mundane of our day's activities – getting up, getting dressed, putting on shoes and so forth. These hardly seem like the makings of a spiritual epiphany. Yet if we were to train ourselves to find G-d only in moments of startling beauty or breathtaking awe, our awareness of G-d in our lives would be very limited. *Birchas HaShachar* teaches us how to take the normal life we live and to feel G-d's holiness and purity in it.

In *Sefer Derech Hashem (Derech Hashem, Volume 4, Chapter 4)*, the *Ramchal* explains the purpose of blessings:

"Before one makes use of [the benefits of] the world...He should

...consider the true nature of that good--that it is more than just a physical and material pleasure, rather it actually is something from Hashem to bring about genuine good [man's perfection and spiritual elevation]."

Despite the physicality of this world – *olam hazeh* -- it is here, using our physical senses, that we have the greatest ability to move closer to G-d. Our sensory experiences -- if we channel them correctly -- have the greatest power to arouse our souls. For example, on Shabbos we make Kiddush on wine, not on Tehillim, even though Tehillim have more holiness. It is our senses -- the delight we experience in drinking wine – that can most powerfully stir our recognition of G-d's good.

Through our *berachos*, we train ourselves to become aware that G-d created this entire world for us to enjoy. When we learn to come close to G-d using our senses, our relationship with Him can be as broad and varied as the world around us.

Visualize:

Images that bring the prayer to life

The life of a two-year old is tough. He wakes up in the morning and longs to jump up out of bed, but alas, he is stuck "behind bars" in his crib until someone has a moment to come free him. He is chilly in his thin summer pajamas, and will remain so until someone dresses him. He is hungry, but he will not be eating until someone feeds him.

The child has a long list of needs, but he is bound and frustrated by the many limita-



tions that prevent him from answering those needs himself. How utterly grateful he feels when help arrives: when he can stand up and run outside, when his mother dresses

him in fresh clothes and gives him his breakfast. Every day, he awaits her like a savior, for without her, he would have no real life.

Although we think of ourselves as self-sustaining, we are all like that two-year old child. Until Hashem frees us from the bounds of sleep, gives us clothing to wear, opens our eyes and sets us on a straight path, we are lying helplessly in bed, barely alive. A child does not stop to think about what his mother does for him but we, Hashem's children, have the gift of *berachos* to enable us to feel His loving care.

Word to the Wise: Meaning within the meaning

Baruch— Blessed: We acknowledge that Hashem is blessed, meaning that He is perfect and complete. We recognize that Hashem is the Source of all blessing, and offer thanks for all that He bestows upon us.

Atah — You: We beseech Hashem directly. The *Tzlach* explains "...when a person says 'Atah' in his *tefillah*... he is speaking with the King of kings 'face to face,' *kaviyachol*, as it were." The *Chofetz Chaim* points out that "Atah" — You [Hashem], refers to the fact that one beseeches Hashem *directly* in prayer.

Take It With You:

Your personal connection to the prayer

If you've ever sacrificed time, money and effort to buy a gift for someone you love, you probably did it all with eager anticipation of the person's response. You could picture his pleasure and gratitude.

But what happens when the gift quickly falls by the wayside? The bracelet worn every day for a week thenceforth sits in a jewelry box. The "must-have" game that riveted the children's attention for two days lays neglected on a shelf. The giver – you – feels that his effort to bring the

recipient joy has failed. "Why bother?" you might ask yourself.

Sometimes, however, a recipient's appreciation remains fresh. "I think of you whenever I use the gift you gave me," someone might say. "It gives me so much pleasure."

The daily morning blessings enable us to become like that second, appreciative person. "Blessed are you, Hashem," is our daily recognition of the Ultimate Giver. Although G-d does not need our thanks, by reciting these words meaningfully, we make ourselves happier. We enable ourselves to revel for a moment in the kindness of our Benefactor, to take an accounting of our riches and to feel the warmth and security of being cared for and loved.

Try This!

This week, when you say the first words of the morning *berachos* – "Boruch atoh Hashem"-- think of those words as a sincere and enthusiastic "thank you!" for a gift you have received.