

Tefillah Focus Of The Week:

אשרי

Recounting Hashem's Greatness

MEANING: The simple translation of the prayer

Happy are those who dwell in Your house; may they always praise you, Selah. Happy is the people for whom this is so, happy is the people whose G-d is Hashem....

אשרי יושבי ביתך,
עוד יהללוך סלה.
אשרי העם שככה לו,
אשרי העם שה' אלקיו.....

WORD TO THE WISE: Meaning within the word

This tefillah begins by declaring, "Happy are the dwellers in Your house." Rav Samson R. Hirsch points out that *יושבי ביתך* does not refer to one who merely "dwells in Hashem's house," in the course of his tefillah, since in that case, the verse would say *בביתך*. Rather, the phrase describes a person who lives his everyday life in the House of Hashem. He goes about his day with an underlying recognition of Hashem's presence and a perspective formed around Hashem's expectations of him (Rav Schwab on Prayer, ArtScroll, Page 168).

THEME:

An essential concept of the prayer

Recognizing the Object of Our Praise

Contemplating Hashem's greatness and benevolence is required to properly praise Hashem.

INSIGHT:

Deeper meanings of the theme

Praising Before Praying

The Gemara (Berachos 4b) explains that the essential text of *אשרי* is Psalm 145—*תהלה לדוד*, a psalm of praise by King Dovid. It contains twenty-one verses that follow the order of the *aleph-beis*, the letters of the Hebrew alphabet. Each verse offers a different praise for Hashem's sustenance of the world, climaxing with the verse "פּוֹתַח אֶת יָדוֹ וּמְשַׁבֵּעַ לְכָל חַי רִצּוֹן" (You open Your hand and satisfy the desire of every living thing), which refers to Hashem's daily sustenance of every living creature.

Despite this emphasis on the material bounty with which Hashem endows the world, *אשרי* does not begin with *תהלה לדוד*, but rather, with the words "אשרי יושבי ביתך עוד יהללוך סלה," (Happy are those who dwell in Your house; they will continue to praise you, Selah.) The Mishnah (Berachos 30b) teaches that from here we learn that one should only rise to pray (Shemoneh Esrei) with an attitude of reverence, as *Rama* (98:1) states: "Before praying (Shemoneh Esrei), one should consider the loftiness of G-d, may He be exalted, and the lowliness of man..."

The Gemara (Berachos 32b) states that the pious men of earlier generations would spend an hour

before prayer contemplating these thoughts, and the source for this practice is the verse *אשרי יושבי ביתך עוד יהללוך סלה*, Praiseworthy are those who dwell in Your house, they will continue to praise you, Selah. *Rashi* expounds that these pious men understood this verse to mean that before beginning the tefillah (Shemoneh Esrei), one must be *יושבי ביתך*, sit and meditate in Your [Hashem's] house. Then one can *יהללוך סלה*, properly praise Hashem. In fact, the reason we recite *אשרי* before Mincha is in order to fulfill our obligation of waiting in contemplation before reciting Shemoneh Esrei.

אשרי presents a unique opportunity to awaken to Hashem's attributes of greatness, focus upon the unbounded goodness Hashem gives us every day, and nurture a sense of gratitude in our hearts. Despite the fact that in our times, we may be unable to contemplate for one hour before we pray Shemoneh Esrei, the custom of the pious ones is reflected in the Shacharis prayer, which provides much time for thoughtful meditation from the beginning of Pesukei D'Zimrah until Shemoneh Esrei is recited. (*Pri Megadim, Eishel Avraham* 93:1).

VISUALIZE:

Images that bring the prayer to life

Open the Package!

David's wealthy uncle from Israel, whom he had never met, arrived at his nephew's home in America. He entered the house carrying a large bag filled with gift-wrapped boxes. "This is all for you, my nephew, Uncle Shmuel told Dovid. "You're the only relative I have, and I want you to have all these gifts."

Dovid said "Thank you! You're the greatest uncle in the world!" Then he set the bag aside, planning to open each



gift later on, in private. Uncle Shmuel responded, "Open the packages, Dovid! How can you say thank you when you don't even know what's in there?" And so Dovid obliged. With each new gift, his gratitude toward his uncle and his admiration for him and his generosity grew stronger. Each package was a treasure, and it was all for him. Now when he said "thank you," it was

a response overflowing with emotion.

Like Dovid in the story, each of us receives a vast endowment of gift packages every day from Hashem. If we do not **stop to consider** the contents of these packages, our gratitude is only a shadow of what it could and should be. Our recognition of Hashem's kindness is stunted. Pesukei d'Zimrah is our way to open our packages every day, so that our love and awe toward our Benefactor can arise from the deepest, sincerest place in our hearts.

Try This!

▶ Think about the joy of receiving a gift you especially wanted. Picture and feel the feeling. That is the "happy" you can connect to when you say the word "אשרי" throughout this tefillah.

Did You Know

▶ **Three Daily Doses**

אשרי is so important that the Gemara (Berachos 4b) states that one who recites it three times a day is worthy to be a *ben olam haba*—one earns a portion in the World to Come. *אשרי* is recited twice during Shacharis (in *Pesukei D'Zimrah* and after *Shemoneh Esrei*) and once at the beginning of *Mincha*. *Birkei Yosef* explains that by reciting *אשרי* three times a day, one will come to recite it with *kavannah* at least once a day, enabling him to merit becoming a *ben olam haba*. *Mishneh Berurah* (1:13) quoting *Magen Avraham* (1:7) who cites *Rabbeinu Bachya* (Tzav 7:37) clarifies that this refers to one who recites it with concentration on its meaning. By pondering the teachings of the verses in *אשרי* three times a day, such a person will merit *olam haba* because he will come to recognize and understand the wonders of Hashem, thereby strengthening his *emunah*.