

Tefillah Focus Of The Week:

אשרי

Kindness and Mercy for All

MEANING: The simple translation of the prayer

Gracious and merciful is Hashem, slow to anger, and great in [bestowing] kindness. **Hashem is good to all; His mercies are on all His works.**

חנון ורחום ה', ארך אפים
וגדל חסד. טוב ה'
לכל, ורחמיו על
כל מעשיו.

WORD TO THE WISE: Meaning within the word

Because G-d is a רחום (merciful), He is slow to anger (ארך אפים). Therefore, punishment, although deserved, is **delayed**, allowing the opportunity over time for even the wicked to repent. Because Hashem is a חנון (gracious), He is גדל חסד (great in bestowing kindness). (*Siach Yitzchok*)

THEME:

An essential concept of the prayer

An Ideal To Emulate

Hashem's traits of kindness and compassion provide us with an ideal to emulate.

INSIGHT:

Deeper meanings of the theme

Kindness and Mercy for All

The first part of the verse *טוב ה' לכל*, Hashem is good to all, refers to all of humanity, even those who rebel and contradict His will (*Eitz Yosef*). Unlike kings and popular leaders, whose kindness is typically reserved for those loyal to them, Hashem's kindness is extended to all creatures, **even those who violate His will** (*Metsudas Dovid*). This is a trait which we highlight and glorify through emulation.

The second part of the verse *ורחמיו על כל מעשיו*, His mercies are on all His works, includes all other forms of life in Hashem's world, including animals, crawling creatures (*Radak*) and even blades of grass and flowers. Hashem embodies and exhibits absolute kindness to *all* creatures – human and animal, loyal ones and wicked ones – all of whom benefit from His world.

But this verse does more than describe Hashem's traits; it sets the paradigm for the way **man should conduct himself** in his own

interactions (*Iyun Tefillah, cited in Siddur Otsar Hatefilos*). Tomer Devorah teaches that “it is proper for man to emulate his Creator... for the essential aspect of the Supernal image and likeness is His deeds.”

The ability to exhibit this Divine trait of compassion is inborn in us, because human beings are created in the Divine image. In fact, the Torah (*Devarim 28:9*) commands us “*V’Halachta biDrachav*,”—“and you shall go in His ways,” meaning that it is our obligation to emulate the compassionate and life-giving ways of Hashem. As the Rambam states:

“Just as the Holy One, blessed be He, is called Compassionate, so should you be compassionate; just as He is called Gracious, so should you be gracious; just as He is called Righteous, so should you be righteous; just as He is called Chassid – the One Who does loving-kindness – so should you be a chassid.” (*Sefer HaMitzvos, Mitzvos Aseh 8*)

VISUALIZE:

Images that bring the prayer to life

Perfect Philanthropy

There is an extraordinarily wealthy philanthropist whose charity extends over a vast spectrum of needy people. Some have inherent problems that make it unlikely that they will ever be able to function without the benefactor's help. Others just need a temporary boost, or perhaps an opportunity – a job or perhaps additional education. Some need medical help, some need food, some need a place to live. Among the people this man helps, there are wonderful,



warm, good-natured individuals just trying to do their best in a tough situation. There are also bitter, angry people, dysfunctional people, and even some outright unkind, uncaring people who would seem to arouse no pity.

However, the philanthropist gives to all. This is the mission he has carved out for his life. If there is a need he can fulfill, he does so. No one has

to be ashamed to ask him for help. He will never say, “Why should I help you?” He feels immense pity for those who are struggling, and even if their struggle leads them to bitterness and hardens their hearts, he will keep giving in the hopes that his kindness will help to soften them.

This is the mercy of Hashem. We can know that whoever we are, whatever our failings, He feels for us and wants nothing more than to give us the help we need to perform our mission in life. Even when we fail to use His gifts wisely, we are always in "His heart", and He will never cease to help us.

Try This!

► Think of a time in which you experienced Hashem's mercy – when you were saved from imminent trouble. Perhaps a potentially serious medical problem turned out to be nothing, or a policeman stopped you for speeding but didn't give you a ticket, or something that worried you was resolved without difficulty. Relive that powerful “Thank G-d!” moment, and think of it when you mention Hashem's kindness and mercy in Ashrei.

Did You Know

► The Song of the Scorpion

Perek Shira, the Chapter of Song, is an ancient text which is sung by Hashem's creations, each creation having its own unique song. *Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh* (*Bereishis 3:1*) explains that “everything that Hashem created has its own system of speech with which to praise Hashem...and go learn this from *Perek Shira*.”

In Chapter 6 of *Perek Shira*, the scorpion says, “*לכל, ורחמיו על כל מעשיו*, Hashem is good to all, His mercies are on all His works.” The scorpion knows all too well about Hashem's mercy. Whoever sees a scorpion desires to kill it immediately, since the scorpion inflicts grave injury. In order that the scorpion species should not be destroyed, Hashem, in His mercy, enabled the scorpion to give birth to up to 100 at a time (*Cited in Shimah Tefilasi, Page 70*).