

Tefillah Focus Of The Week:

אשרי

The Power of Sincerity

MEANING: The simple translation of the prayer

Righteous is Hashem in all His ways, and magnanimous in all His deeds. Hashem is close to all who call upon Him—to all who call upon Him sincerely.

צדיק ה' בכל דרכיו, וחסיד
בכל מעשיו. קרוב ה'
לכל קראיו, לכל
אשר יקראהו באמת.

WORD TO THE WISE: Meaning within the word



The words of *Ashrei* hold out the promise of a true, deep connection to Hashem for those who pray with their hearts: *Hashem is close to all who call upon Him, to all who call upon Him sincerely.* The *Radak* (*Tehillim* 145:18) says **באמת** refers to those whose prayers are a unified harmony of mind, heart and words. Fueled by *kavannah*, these are the prayers with the power to reach their destination.

The *Abudraham* notes that the numerical equivalent of the words “*tefillah*” and “*b’kavanas halev*” (with concentration of the heart) is the same — 515 — indicating that “according to the level of *kavannah* will prayer be accepted.”

The word *lev*, heart, in all its variations, appears in the Torah a total of 113 times; this is also the total number of words found in the final sentences of all the *berachos* of *Shemoneh Esrei* (e.g. “*Baruch Atah Hashem Magen Avraham*” is five words). From this connection, we learn that the concentration of our *lev* (*kavannah*) is what draws into our lives the many aspects of Hashem’s goodness expressed by the *berachos* of *Shemoneh Esrei*. (*Baal HaTurim, Shemos*, 40:21.)

THEME:

An essential concept of the prayer

Seeking Our Hearts

Hashem seeks and answers our heartfelt prayers.

INSIGHT:

Deeper meanings of the theme

How Our Troubles Initiate Salvation

קרוב ה' לכל קראיו, לכל אשר יקראהו באמת, *Hashem is close to all who call upon Him—to all who call upon Him sincerely.* The words, “קרוב ה' לכל קראיו, לכל אשר יקראהו” appear to be redundant. However, the *Baal Haflaah* in *Panim Yafos* explains that the first part of the verse, קרוב ה' לכל קראיו, refers to an individual before he actually calls upon Hashem. Hashem, in His kindness, awakens him so that he can meet the description of יקראהו באמת – he will be roused to pray to Hashem *sincerely*. When the person prays with sincerity, Hashem can help him in his time of great need.

Sometimes, Hashem must press upon a person or the Jewish people as a whole to arouse the kind of sincerity needed to evoke a *yeshua*. For example, at the end of the Egyptian exile, Pharaoh makes the conditions of slavery harsher by refusing to supply the Jews with materials to make bricks, while still requiring “the same production quota (*see Shemos* 5:7-8).” Why did Hashem begin our salvation by worsening our situation? Rav Mattisyahu Salomon explains (With Hearts Full

of Faith (Artscroll, p.124-125) that “...When Hashem wants to redeem us but finds insufficient merit to justify redemption, He intensifies the darkness. ... The hardships are to bring us to reach up to Hashem with higher levels of prayer...”

On a personal level, we may believe that we are praying with every ounce of *kavannah* we can find within ourselves, yet Hashem sees far more in us than we can perceive. Embedded within our troubles, He sends us a loving message: “I know you and care about you, and I know there is a depth to you that you have not yet tapped.” The difficulties may really be Hashem’s call to us, urging us to uncover the powerful emotions and *kavannah* in the deeper recesses of our hearts.

Misfortune and difficulty — whether related to health, finances, children, family or even spiritual issues — are a part of every life. When these troubles serve as the spark that ignites our passion and sincerity in *prayer*, then we transform those troubles into “the beginning of our salvation.”

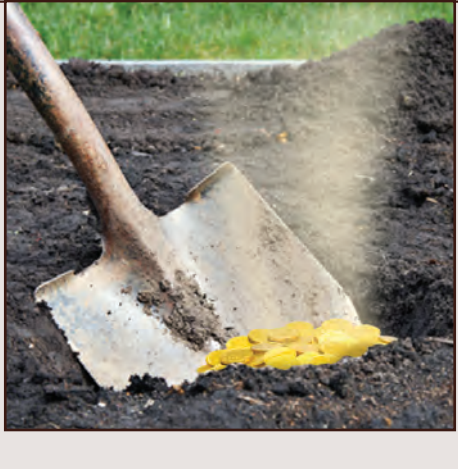
VISUALIZE:

Images that bring the prayer to life

Digging Deeper and Deeper

Two men purchase a plot of land. The seller tells one of the men, “Somewhere on this property, I believe there may be a buried treasure.” He tells the other man, “Somewhere on this property, there is a buried treasure.”

Both men decide to excavate and see if they can find the



treasure. After months of work, however, the first man quits. “This is ridiculous,” he says. “There’s probably no treasure at all.”

The second man, however, believes that the treasure is there. It’s just a matter of

finding it. Thus, he persists, digging deeper and deeper until he finds what he is seeking.

Likewise, a person who believes that prayer “might help, and it can’t hurt,” prays differently from one who believes, “this is the one and only place to find help.” The second person keeps praying, digging deeper and deeper into his heart until he finds his answer. It is this second type of prayer that is described by לכל אשר יקראהו באמת.

Try This!

Choose one challenge in your life that is of particular importance to you, and focus on praying for help in that area, using all the concentration you can muster, repeating your prayer each day with renewed energy. Keep a record of developments in this area of your life as you continue to intensify your prayer.

Did You Know

The Key to Continuing Care

Ashrei is recited three times each day. It is first recited in *Pesukei D’Zimrah*, a second time towards the end of *Shacharis*, and a third time at the start of *Mincha*. The Zohar explains that the first time *Ashrei* is recited, it is intended to serve as praise to Hashem for providing all of our needs. The other two times *Ashrei* is recited, it is intended to serve as a prayer and supplication that He will indeed continue to provide for us.