

Tefillah Focus Of The Week:

ברכת קריאת שמע

Our Stronghold and Shield

MEANING: The simple translation of the prayer

...Master of our power, our rock-like stronghold, Shield of our salvation, be a stronghold for us. The blessed G-d, Who is great in knowledge, prepared and worked on the rays of the sun...constantly relate the honor of G-d and His sanctity...

...אדון עזנו, צור
משגבנו, מגן ישענו,
משגב בעדנו. א-ל
ברוך גדול דעה, הכין ופעל
זהרי חמה... תמיד מספרים
כבוד א-ל וקדשתו....

WORD TO THE WISE: Meaning within the word



The words of the tefillah beginning with א-ל ברוך, follow the order of the aleph-bais, through the word תמיד which begins with the last letter of the alphabet ת. Abudraham explains that this is to inform us that heaven and earth continue to exist in the merit of Torah, which includes all the letters of the aleph-bais. A verse in Yirmiyahu (33:25) states, "So said the L-rd, if not [for] My covenant of day and night, the statutes of heaven and earth I would not have established." The Gemara (Pesachim 68b) concludes that the verse expressly states that the very existence of the world depends on Torah study. He derives this by referring to the verse in Yehoshua (1:8)

which states, "You shall contemplate it [Torah] day and night." Thus, he concludes that "My covenant of day and night" refers to the Torah, which must be studied day and night.

The alphabetical style has mystical origins as well, according to Eitz Yosef. He tells of a Midrash in which Rav Elazar Hakalir, one of the most prolific liturgical poets, ascended to heaven to learn from the angels the secret of writing hymns. When he asked the angels how they sing to Hashem, the angel מיכאל said that they use alphabetical hymns. This part of Shacharis, written in the order of the aleph-bais, is an allusion to that Midrash and in fact, it hints to the name מיכאל in the words מספרים (תמיד) (written after the word כבוד א-ל).

THEME:

An essential concept of the prayer

The Source of Strength

Hashem is our protection and our strength.

INSIGHT:

Deeper meanings of the theme

Our Strength at Every Stage

The commentary Avnei Eliyahu, which is found in the Siddur HaGra, explains that אדון עזנו, צור משגבנו, מגן ישענו, משגב בעדנו refers to the mercy Hashem extends to us throughout the four stages of life.

In the first stage, that of infancy (from birth until about 10 years old), a child is helpless and is, for the most part, defenseless on his own. He is able to survive only because Hashem is אדון עזנו, He strengthens us at such a vulnerable stage of life.

In the next stage, the child develops into a young adult (until about 20 years old), who is able to defend himself with physical strength. We praise Hashem as צור משגבנו, Rock of our stronghold,

for providing that strength as we grow.

During the next stage, that of a mature adult (until about 60 years old), the person marries and raises a family. Hashem is מגן ישענו Shield of our salvation, by providing our daily sustenance enabling us to survive. Further, He protects us from the countless dangers that we perceive in our daily lives, and protects us as well from the numerous dangers that we do not even perceive because He shields us.

Finally, in our old age, Hashem is משגב בעדנו, a stronghold for us. Because the elderly are frail and weak, they must rely on Hashem for their strength, which He provides.

VISUALIZE:

Images that bring the prayer to life

A Fortress

The army went out to fight a war. First, it found a "stronghold," a defensible location from which to launch its campaigns and to which it could retreat when it was under attack. The stronghold was an impenetrable fortress made of thick, high walls of solid stone. Inside, the soldiers



knew they would be safe. The enemy's artillery fire could not reach them. The enemy soldiers could not breach the walls. Inside their fortress, they could feel safe and secure. Wisely, they spent as much

time within the fortress as their mission would allow.

Hashem is our "stronghold." He is there for us, providing us with shelter from all the dangers, pain and disappointments of this world. Whenever we run to Him to seek shelter, His impenetrable protection is there for us, shielding us from harm and calming our hearts with the security He alone can provide.

Try This!

► Imagine a fortress such as the one described in "Visualize" above. Imagine knowing that whenever life's troubles pursue you, you can simply slip inside this fortress and be safe. Think of that sense of security and protection when you say the words אדון עזנו, צור משגבנו, מגן ישענו, משגב בעדנו....

Did You Know

► No Interruptions, Please

A person may not respond to someone even with words of Torah when he is at a point where interruptions are prohibited, such as during the *birchas Kriyas Shema*. Interruptions are not permitted between the segments of the *brochos* or during the segments. (Mishneh Berurah 66:2). Whenever interruptions are prohibited, they are even prohibited if spoken in *loshon kodesh*, and even if the interruption is only a single word (Ibid 66:1).