

Tefillah Focus Of The Week:

שמע
Loving G-d

MEANING: The simple translation of the prayer

You shall love Hashem, your G-d, with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your resources.

ואהבת את ה'
אלקיך, בכל לבבך,
ובכל נפשך, ובכל מאדך.

WORD TO THE WISE: Meaning within the word



The Torah requires us to love Hashem, our G-d, with our heart, with our soul and with our resources—, בכל לבבך, ובכל נפשך, ובכל מאדך. To honor G-d only with the mind and the spirit is not sufficient. We must be ready to surrender our physical existence, our desires and our fortune, as true love expresses itself by the desire to sacrifice everything. Further, the Torah places emphasis on the word כל. G-d requires us to love Him—, בכל לבבך ובכל נפשך ובכל מאדך—with all your heart, with all your soul and with all

your means. Why is that so?

The answer is that once we acknowledge that Hashem is our G-d, Hashem, the One and Only, then He is the sole Source of our whole being, volition and fortune. If everything comes from the one G-d, Who gives with love, then we are His in every aspect of our being. We are His with all we think, and want and possess. Everything that we possess is a bond that joins us to G-d. Everything is given to us as a pledge of His love, and we dedicate everything to Him as an offering of our reciprocal love (The Hirsch Chumash, Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch, Sefer Devarim 6:5, Feldheim Publishers).

THEME:

An essential concept of the prayer

Reciprocated Love

Loving G-d wholeheartedly comes from feeling His personal involvement in our lives as individuals and as a nation.

INSIGHT:

Deeper meanings of the theme

Your G-d

In the first verse of שמע ישראל, we refer to ה' as Hashem Who reveals himself as G-d to our entire nation. The second section of שמע, ואהבת, addresses each individual and shows him G-d as his personal G-d, ה' אלקיך, Who carries each individual throughout the course of his life and seeks to guide him in all his actions. G-d cares about each individual and watches over him with His love and guidance. When a person thinks of G-d as his personal G-d, he is better able to love G-d, ואהבת את ה' אלקיך (The Hirsch Chumash, Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch, Sefer Devarim 6:5, Feldheim Publishers).

As we stated in 'Praying With Passion', Issue 106, Shema 1, ("Insight"), שמע expresses the central tenet and foundation of Judaism, that of a Jew's faith, *emunah*, as the devoted subject of the One, All-Powerful King. Rav Tzadak Hakohen (*Tzidkas Hatzadik*, Os 154) teaches that there is more than one level of *emunah*. Just as one must have faith, belief and trust in G-d, he must also believe in himself. That is to say, that Hashem cares about what each individual is doing in this world. Similar to a loving father, Hashem cares if His children make it in life.

When it comes to milestones, your baby's first steps can't be beat. One day he's inching along the couch, holding onto it for support, and the

next moment, he's tottering hesitantly into your waiting arms. Your child's first steps are his first major move toward independence.

Why is a parent so excited when his child takes his first steps? It is because the parent loves the child to the point where the child's health, success and happiness are synonymous with the parent's happiness. Conversely, when one's child is ill, G-d forbid, a parent does not think of it as the "child's problem." Rather, it is top on the list of the parent's own worries. The parent could not be more concerned if he were sick himself, and in fact, many parents would rather be sick themselves than to see their child suffer.

That great, unselfish love and devotion is just a whisper of the fatherly love Hashem feels for each and every one of His children. His infinite supply of love and kindness is never exhausted, and is therefore ample to embrace each person individually as he navigates through life's challenges and revels in life's triumphs. Knowing this makes all the difference in the world, for it places us in the context of a loving relationship with G-d. We are thereby assured of Divine assistance as we attempt to fulfill our mission in life, and are motivated by our love to serve wholeheartedly the One who holds us dear.

VISUALIZE:

Images that bring the prayer to life

At Home With G-d

A small child lives in an orphanage. He sleeps in a large room with nine other children. He eats in a dining hall and plays in a playground equipped for all 150 children residing in the institution. The people who run the orphanage are kind-hearted and well-intentioned. They have created a world with the children's overall health and happiness in mind, but they cannot possibly tailor everything to the needs of each individual child. Therefore, a child may go to



sleep each night in a room he finds too warm or too cold. Several nights a week, he may be served food that he finds distasteful. In the playground, the swings may be too high for him to reach, and the slide may seem frighteningly steep.

Then, one day, the child is adopted by a family. His new parents shower him with love. His mother cooks his favorite foods. His father gladly opens the window of his bedroom

a bit to give him the fresh air he needs to sleep comfortably. The backyard is outfitted with a swing set made for children his age. The child instinctively feels his parents' love from their effort to create a world just right for him.

Hashem did not just create the world, put us in it and stand back to watch what happens. He interacts with us minute by minute, guiding our steps and filling our needs. When we open our eyes to this truth, our own overwhelming love instinctively flows back to Him.

Try This!

Imagine a nurse handing you a newborn and telling you, "Here's a baby." Now imagine her handing you a baby and saying, "Here's your baby." These are two vastly different experiences. The bond of love that springs into being immediately with the words "your baby" is there because this baby is yours. Think of that overflowing love when you say the word אלקיך, "your G-d," in ואהבת את ה' אלקיך.

Did You Know

Shutting Out Distractions

It is customary for one to put his right hand over his eyes when he reads the first verse of שמע, so that he will not be distracted by the sights around him (Orach Chaim 61:5, Mishneh Berurah, ibid:17). The source of this custom is the Talmud (Berachos 13b), which states that when Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi would deliver a Torah lecture, and the time arrived for reciting שמע, he covered his eyes in order to help him concentrate on the words and not be distracted by his students.