

Tefillah Focus Of The Week:


שמע  
Today's Agenda

**MEANING:** The simple translation of the prayer

Let these matters that I command you today be upon your heart.

והיו הדברים האלה  
אשר אנכי מצוך  
היום על לבבך.

**WORD TO THE WISE:** Meaning within the word



In this prayer, we state that these matters that Hashem commands us today, היום, should be upon our heart. This raises the question—have the commandments all been commanded today? They were commanded to us at Mount Sinai 2448 years after Creation, which was 3324 years ago (5772-2448= 3324). The use of the word “today” teaches that although the Torah was given thousands of years ago, we are not to regard the commandments as an ancient rite that we follow out of loyalty and habit. Rather, we are to regard them with as much freshness and enthusiasm as if G-d had given

them today (*Sifrei*).

Rashi (*Devarim*, 6:6) explains that היום means that the words of the Torah “should *not* be in your eyes like an old law to which a person does not attach importance; rather, they should be like a new one to which everybody runs.”

Because of the innate desire for newness, prayers that one recites and mitzvos that one performs regularly are prone to losing their vitality. To the extent that a person can heed the Torah's words to accept Hashem's commandments “today” — each day anew — he can inject the spirit of freshness into his performance of mitzvos and the recitation of prayers.

**THEME:**

An essential concept of the prayer

“New” Commandments

We should accept the Torah and mitzvos each day as if Hashem has just given them to us.

**INSIGHT:**

Deeper meanings of the theme

What's New

The *Midrash* (*Devarim Rabbah*, 1:11) notes that Avraham Avinu was not told that his descendants would miraculously subsist on *manna* in the desert. Had Avraham been given this information, it would have been passed down through the generations and been known by the Jews who were redeemed from Egypt. When it finally came to fruition, it would have failed to impress them. “We already knew about the *manna* while in Egypt at the table of Pharaoh,” they would have said. Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz (*Sichos Mussar, Sha'arei Chaim, Ma'amar* 38, page 160) explains that the lesson in this *Midrash* is that even an open miracle loses its impact if it is not perceived as something new and unanticipated. Even miracles can seem routine!

Newness has a unique power to excite one's heart, and that excitement provides the power for higher levels of achievement. Rav Dessler (*Sefer HaZikaron L'Baal Michtav M'Eliyahu*, Volume 2, page 13) explains: “The root of enjoyment by mankind is built on newness and change.... The greater the change or newness the greater is one's

satisfaction and pleasure.”

The Gemara (*Yoma* 29a) reveals this concept through a statement that seems to contradict common sense. It states that to relearn something that has already been studied and forgotten is more difficult than to learn something new.

The *Chochmah U'Mussar* (Volume 2, *Ma'amar* 219) poses the obvious question: Should it not be easier to relearn familiar material than to tackle something completely new? The answer offers insight into human nature. A person naturally experiences a sense of excitement when striving to comprehend a new lesson or skill, and therefore, he does not need to expend great effort. Relearning old lessons, on the other hand, is devoid of the thrill of newness. It is an act of pure self-discipline and will, which require tremendous effort.

By accepting the mitzvos as if they were given to us “anew” each day, we can inject a sense of “newness” into our observance of the mitzvos.

**VISUALIZE:**

Images that bring the prayer to life

Finding Renewal

It's a day before the boy's thirteenth birthday. His father comes home bearing a package. Finally! They came! His tefillin were completed. He opened the package and reverently removed the smooth, polished leather boxes from their case. The next morning, with his father by his side, he carefully donned his new tefillin, feeling as if he were already standing upon a whole new, higher rung of



spiritual life. He knew this tefillah while wearing tefillin had to be different. He wasn't a little boy any more. Now it was “for real.”

It was, of course, equally real two years later. However, the inspiration emanating from those sacred boxes had long ceased to move him. He could put the tefillin on as mechanically as he would don

his socks. The newness was gone, and with it went the tefillin's power to move him.

If this boy wishes to conquer his sense of staleness with the mitzvah of tefillin, he needs to recognize that the mitzvah is given to him anew each day. Every mitzvah a person performs, whether it is done several times a day, once a week or once a year, is integral to that person's performance of his mission in life. Every day is new, and every day counts.

**Try This!**

Imagine if every day, Hashem provided you with a “work order” with the mitzvos you had to perform that day in order to fulfill your life's mission. You would consult your to-do list throughout the day, mentally checking off each task completed and assessing how much closer you were to receiving the full measure of merit for that day. You would know that yesterday's *netilas yadayim* could not stand in place of today's *netilas yadayim*. Yesterday's chessed could not fill the special niche of today's chessed. Yesterday's tefillah could not do the job of today's tefillah. Think of that sense of renewed daily urgency to fulfill Hashem's mitzvos as you say the words אנכי מצוך היום.

**Did You Know**

► Sight Unseen

Last week's ‘Praying With Passion’, Issue 108, Shema 3, (“Did You Know”), cited Orach Chaim 61:5, and Mishneh Berurah, *ibid*:17 that it is customary for one to put his right hand over his face when he reads the first verse of שמע, so that he will not become distracted by the sights surrounding him.

Another reason to cover one's eyes is based on the lesson stated in ‘Praying With Passion’, Issue 107, Shema 2, (“Insight”). The declaration of שמע ישראל ה' אלקינו ה' אחד, “Hear, O Israel,” is that the Name ה' ( *Yud-Kay-Vov-Kay* ), which represents G-d's mercy and compassion, and the Name אלקינו – our G-d of Justice -- are אחד, all one and the same. In other words, we believe that ultimately all that happens in this world comes from the name ה' ( *Yud-Kay-Vov-Kay* ) – the Name associated with mercy. Yet, the sight of the misfortunes and injustices that sometimes occur in this world could potentially shake our declaration of שמע which is a foundation of *emunah*. We therefore cover our eyes while reciting שמע to symbolize that although events may appear to our eyes in this world to be inconsistent with the declaration of שמע, in the next world man will fully appreciate that our G-d of Justice is indeed ה' אחד, the Name associated with mercy.