

Tefillah Focus Of The Week:

עזרת אבותינו


Our Shield

MEANING: The simple translation of the prayer

The **Helper of our forefathers** are You alone, forever, **Shield and Savior** for them and for their children after them in every generation... True—You are the First and You are the Last, and other than You we have no king, redeemer, or savior...

עזרת אבותינו אתה
הוא מעולם, מגן ומושיע
לבניהם אחריהם בכל דור
ודור... אמת אתה הוא ראשון
ואתה הוא אחרון, ומבלעדיך
אין לנו מלך גואל ומושיע...

WORD TO THE WISE: Meaning within the word



The text of this prayer uses the word עזרת (from the root word עזר) to describe the help Hashem gave to our forefathers. However, when it refers to the aid Hashem has given to ensuing generations, it uses the words מגן ומושיע, Shield and Savior. Eitz Yosef explains that the word עזר applies to instances in which the people receiving the help assist the one providing it. However, when the recipient does not aid in his assistance, then the words מגן ומושיע are used.

Our forefathers' righteous actions merited Hashem's help. Therefore, the word עזרת is properly used to signify that our forefathers were participants in effecting the Divine assistance they received. The subsequent generations, however, were not as meritorious. Their actions did not rise to the level that earned them the merit for Hashem to help. Nevertheless, Hashem was a מגן ומושיע, a Shield and a Savior for them despite their lack of merit.

THEME:

An essential concept of the prayer

Eternally at Our Side

Hashem helps us in every generation whether we actively merit it or not.

INSIGHT:

Deeper meanings of the theme

Inherited Merit

In "Word to the Wise," we noted that our forefathers' righteous actions were a great merit which contributed to Hashem providing help. The subsequent generations' actions, however, were not as meritorious. As we focus on our own generation, this assessment seems to create a great dilemma. Each generation grows more superficial and less spiritually sensitive. Chazal (*Shabbos* 112b) teach that, "If the earlier generations were like angels, we are but like mere humans; if they were like humans, we are like donkeys." In that case, upon what foundation does continued hope for hastening the Redemption rest? If the previous spiritually loftier generations haven't brought Mashiach, how likely is it that our present generation, which is spiritually inferior, will merit witnessing the Final Redemption?

We need not despair over the impact of the declining generations. The virtues of

generations past remain in our account like an inheritance from our forefathers. G-d has held onto each prayer for redemption that was issued from our ancestors' lips. All the prayers, *mitzvos* and good deeds of the past, added to our own, form an ever-growing pool of merit for the Jewish people (*Chofetz Chaim on Torah, Parashas Nitzavim* 29:28).

In the words of the Chofetz Chaim (*Machaneh Yisrael*, Ch. 25) we are "like a midget standing on the shoulders of a giant." The midget's position on the giant's shoulders gives him greater height than that of the giant himself. Likewise, the Chofetz Chaim asserts, the merit of all the generations accumulates until it suffices to warrant the redemption. When that moment arrives, Mashiach will come immediately, even if the generation at that time is spiritually inferior. (*Chafetz Chaim al HaTorah, Devarim* 30:3).

VISUALIZE:

Images that bring the prayer to life

Help Behind the Scenes

David Goodstein was a model citizen, a major contributor to the economy of his city and a person of unassailable character. Therefore, when his thriving sneaker factory was burned down by vandals, it was no surprise that the mayor called for an all-out effort to bring the perpetrators to justice. When an electrical outage hit the town, the mayor made sure that David's block was on the top of the electric company's list for restoring service. When David was honored at a



yeshiva dinner, the mayor was delighted to stand at the podium and recount David's praises. When David passed away at a ripe old age, his sons took over his enterprises. Based on the mayor's relationship with David, he was always ready and willing to help the sons. But because they operated on a more human scale – without the superhuman integrity of their father – the mayor felt it best to provide his assistance behind the scenes, smoothing

the way for them out of the public eye.

Likewise, for our forefathers, whose merit was great, Hashem could come to their rescue and help them through their tests and challenges. We, their children, do not merit the same level of patent involvement from Above. Nevertheless, because of our relationship with the forefathers and our acceptance of their legacy, Hashem shields us and saves us from troubles we may not even know about, and continues to help us behind the scenes.

Try This!

► Imagine a wonderful, true friend who would give up his life for you. (If you are fortunate to have such a friend, you don't have to imagine.) Now imagine that the friend left this world and trusted you watch over his children. Would you not help them and shelter them in every way possible? Think of that protective love when you say מגן ומושיע לבניהם.

Did You Know

► *Signaling for Quiet*

Last week's *halacha* explained that a person should not communicate by making eye movements, mouthing words or pointing with his fingers while he reads the first passage of *Kerias Shema*.

However, one may signal for quiet (i.e. make gestures with one's hands to a crying child) so that the other person will be silent and not disturb him from praying. As this is permitted during *Shemoneh Esrei* (*Mishneh Berurah*, Siman 104:1), certainly it is permitted during *Kerias Shema*.