

Tefillah Focus Of The Week:

שמנה עשרה

Opening Our Personal Connection With Hashem

MEANING: The simple translation of the prayer

My L-rd, open my lips, that my mouth may declare Your praise.

אד-ני שפתי
תפתח ופי יגיד
תהלתך.

WORD TO THE WISE: Meaning within the word

Ramban (Emunah and Bitachon, Perek 9) maintains, that in the context of this *passuk*, the term שפתי, *my lips*, is related to "sefas hanahar", the river bank, which is the barrier which confines the river to its channel. R' Mordechai Gifter (cited in Tehillim Treasury, ArtScroll) elaborates that our material and physical concerns are the barrier which traps the soul within its confines.

enables us to break loose of our self-imposed impediments and enjoy the flow of our own natural spirituality.

By giving each of us a soul, Hashem has taken a fragment of 'His Spirit' and embedded it within each human body. The introduction to Shemoneh Esrei, "Hashem, open my lips that my mouth may declare Your praise" is, therefore, a plea for Hashem to open our lips and remove all physical impediments to the dialogue between the Divine within us and the Divine all around us. In effect, parts of a whole yearn to be reunited, and in tefillah, they are (Tzidak HaTzadik, Os 209).

THEME:

An essential concept of the prayer

Connecting

We preface the Shemoneh Esrei with words that signify our soul's longing to connect with Hashem.

INSIGHT:

Deeper meanings of the theme

Close with the King

A person can attend the most elaborate wedding imaginable and spend most of the evening feeling bored and ambivalent. Why? Because there is no one at the table with whom he connects. On the other hand, one can spend a half-hour waiting on line at the bank and find it exhilarating. Why? Because he encounters an old friend and spends the time engaged in a meaningful conversation. Human beings yearn to feel connected. Every person cherishes the feeling of being valued, cared for, heard and understood.

Yet this feeling, fulfilling as it is, is just a glint of the radiance one can experience from the greatest connection of all – that of a person to his Creator. In those moments of true connection during Shemoneh Esrei, one is filled to the overflowing with a deep, intrinsic sense of purpose and of bonding with G-d. That is because in those meaningful moments, one is fulfilling the purpose of his creation, which is to build a relationship with G-d.

As we begin to recite Shemoneh Esrei, we recognize that Hashem is the Master of all,

Who, with mere utterances, brought the universe into existence (Avos 5:1). A raging fire, a surging sea, a fierce hurricane wind that rips up trees by their roots –these displays of awesome force are only the smallest sensory measure of His absolute power.

On the other side of that dynamic, however, is the fact that this Awesome Being is also the epitome of giving, goodness and tenderness. Every moment of life, and every element that sustains and enriches life, is an invaluable gift from Hashem. Since nothing is more precious to a person than life, Hashem is the ultimate personal benefactor. Everything He sends into one's life, stems from Hashem's pure goodness and desire for a connection with each of His children.

This, in fact, is the message conveyed by the first word of the Shemoneh Esrei. אד-ני – *my G-d*, שפתי תפתח, open my lips. To be able to say that Hashem is "my G-d" is a profound statement of personal connection: Yes, He created and rules the universe, but He and I are very close (see Abudraham).

VISUALIZE:

Images that bring the prayer to life

Ready Access

Mr. Gold runs a huge investment bank. All day long, he deals with multi-billionaires from around the world. He understands the complex underpinnings of the global economy, stocks, derivatives and investments of all kinds. The Federal Reserve calls him for advice. Yet, whenever one of the young men or women who work in his



mail room knocks on his door, he is ready to drop everything and give him or her his time. He has put some of them through college, given some of them loans and helped many of them with personal problems. Why? Because he recognizes their potential and delights in helping them develop it. In his

mind, that's what being rich and powerful is all about.

To the mail-room clerks at Mr. Gold's investment bank, their access to this tremendously powerful man is almost beyond belief. How could it be that he takes interest in their personal lives when he's got a global economy to run? All the more unbelievable is our access to Hashem, and His personal interest in us, which we signify when calling upon Him as "אד-ני."

Try This!

Imagine that you are going to visit Mr. Gold, the executive in the Visualize scenario in this issue. You have many areas of need with which you hope he will help you. At the very least, you know he will hear you out and steer you in the direction that is best for you. Full of hope and grateful for his always dependable willingness to help, you "knock on the door" with the phrase אד-ני שפתי תפתח ופי יגיד תהלתך.

Did You Know

Part of the Prayer

As stated in last week's issue, one is not permitted to make any interruption between ברוך אתה ה', גאל ישראל, the mention of the redemption, and the Shemoneh Esrei (Orach Chaim 111:1). Since the Sages attached אד-ני שפתי תפתח ופי יגיד תהלתך to *Shemoneh Esrei*, it is considered as part of the prayer and is not deemed an interruption (Berachos 9b). For this reason, we may say the verse אד-ני שפתי תפתח ופי יגיד תהלתך between the mention of גאל ישראל and *Shemoneh Esrei*. However, if one did not recite אד-ני שפתי תפתח ופי יגיד תהלתך, he need not repeat the *Shemoneh Esrei* (Beur Halacha, Siman 111:2, s.v. "Chozeir").