

Tefillah Focus Of The Week:

שמנה עשרה

Awaiting Our Return

MEANING: The simple translation of the prayer

Bring us back, our Father, to Your Torah, and bring us near, our King, to your service, and influence us to return in perfect repentance before You. Blessed are You, Hashem, Who desires repentance.

השיבנו אבינו לתורתך,
וקרבנו מלכנו
לעבודתך, והחזירנו
בתשובה שלמה
לפניך. ברוך אתה ה',
הרוצה בתשובה.

WORD TO THE WISE: Meaning within the word

All of the blessings in Shemoneh Esrei end by defining Hashem as the One Who can provide the specific form of help which we are requesting. For example, Hashem is the "חונן הדעת", the Gracious Giver of knowledge; the "רופא חולי עמו ישראל", the Healer of the sick of His nation. However, we do not conclude the blessing for *teshuvah* with the words "HaMachazir bi'Teshuvah," Who brings us back in *teshuvah*, because *teshuvah* has to begin with us. Hashem can provide everything for us—He can give us knowledge, He can

heal us, He can build Jerusalem. However, He cannot do *teshuvah* for us. Nevertheless, Hashem desires and eagerly awaits our *teshuvah* and will even help us in our quest for *teshuvah*.

This is so even though we may utilize the very gifts Hashem gives us to commit sins. He grants us intelligence, strength, vitality, creativity, money, and health, and we use these to pursue our own misguided objectives. Nevertheless, so deep is Hashem's desire for closeness to us that He continues to wait for the awakening within us that will carry us to *teshuvah*.

THEME:

An essential concept of the prayer

Ready and Waiting

Because Hashem desires closeness with us, He accepts our sincere effort to perfect ourselves, even if we fall short.

INSIGHT:

Deeper meanings of the theme

Credit Repair

We conclude this blessing by asking for perfect repentance. Is there any other kind of *teshuvah* besides a perfect *teshuvah*? Is anything less than a perfect *teshuvah* acceptable? The following parable from the Chofetz Chaim provides the answer: *A merchant, who regularly did business with a certain supplier, made several large orders for goods but was unable to pay. When he again made a large order, the supplier decided he had had enough. He told the merchant, "No payment, and no goods. How can I trust you?"* The merchant decided to attempt to win back the supplier's trust by ordering a small shipment and immediately paying for it with cash. He reasoned that by selling the small amount of goods, he

would earn the cash to order and pay for more goods, thereby regaining the supplier's trust once again. Over time, he was able to repay his debt to the supplier and eventually rebuild his business. Oftentimes we resolve to change our ways and to return completely to Hashem. However, similar to the merchant, we often find ourselves short of the task. How then do we go about winning Hashem's trust? Says the Chofetz Chaim, just as the merchant realized that he did not have to pay his debt all at once to win the supplier's confidence, we too can return to Hashem by changing our behavior in small, doable increments. In this way, we can regain Hashem's trust (Rabbi Frand In Print, Rabbi Yissocher Frand, ArtScroll, page 38).

VISUALIZE:
Images that bring the prayer to life

Would You if You Could?

"Oh, if I only had enough money, I'd be such a *baal tzedakah!*"

"Oh, if I were only smarter, I'd learn Torah all day!"

"Oh, if I had only grown up in a more religious home, I'd be such a *tzadik!*"

Teshuvah is often self-limited by what people consider their inherent deficiencies that prevent them from rising to the highest potential in



their spirituality. How does Hashem expect "perfect *teshuvah*" from imperfect people? Why does He not send us into the world fully equipped to ascend to the top? The proof of a person's true desire for *teshuvah* is in what he does with the assets he

has. If he doesn't even give a little money when he has some available, his stated desire to become a major philanthropist falls flat. If he does not learn as often as he can at his current level, he belies his desire to become a *talmid chochom*. If he turns away from opportunities to improve his *yiras Shomayim* at his current level, he disproves his true desire to become a *tzadik*. Hashem does not expect perfection. He desires our perfect desire for Him, as indicated by choices we make with the assets we have.

Try This!

Think of all the things that block your complete, enthusiastic service to Hashem. Some of these obstacles might include bad habits, fatigue, distraction, rote performance of mitzvos, a quick temper, over-attachment to material things or popular culture, a cynical, skeptical mindset, difficulty with learning – anything that stands between your *neshama* and its ability to fully cleave to Hashem's will. Imagine all of that as a large, dark thundercloud obscuring your *neshama*, and think of that cloud drifting off and revealing the light behind it when you say והחזירנו בתשובה שלמה.

Did You Know

When a Child Interrupts

While reciting Shemoneh Esrei, one should not make an interruption. Even a mere gesture is forbidden, unless to a crying child. One is permitted to make gestures with one's hands to a crying child, so that he will be silent and not disturb him from having kavannah while reciting Shemoneh Esrei. If the gestures are of no use he should move himself away from the child or walk over to the child to quiet him down. However, he may not talk to him in order to quiet him down (*Mishneh Berurah* 104:1).