

Tefillah Focus Of The Week:

שמנה עשרה

Help from Above

MEANING: The simple translation of the prayer

May the expressions of my mouth. ...

My G-d, guard my tongue from evil and my lips from speaking deceitfully. To those who curse me, let my soul be silent and let my soul be like dust to everyone...As for all those who oppose and who design evil against me, speedily nullify their counsel and disrupt their design...

יהיו לרצון אמרי פי ...
אלקי, נצור לשוני
מרע, ושפתי מדבר
מרמה. ולמקללי נפשי תדם,
ונפשי כעפר לכל תהיה...
וכל החושבים עלי רעה,
מהרה הפך עצתם וקלקל
מחשבתם...

WORD TO THE WISE: Meaning within the word

The Gemara (Bava Basra 165a) teaches, "Everybody violates *avak lashon hara*, the 'dust' of *lashon hara*," which is *lashon hara* in its most subtle form. Because the temptation to fall into this transgression is so strong, a special prayer for the avoidance of *lashon hara*, נצור לשוני מרע, is added. But why is a prayer to avoid מרמה, speaking deceitfully, included? Rav Schwab (Rav Schwab on Prayer, Artscroll,

Page 536) explains that avoidance of *lashon hara* can lead to מרמה, speaking deceitfully when, in an effort to conceal the details of something derogatory that was said about another, a person might fabricate something and tell an untruth—a מרמה. Therefore, we beseech Hashem with a prayer to help us avoid circumstances where we might be tempted to be deceitful and tell an untruth, no matter how righteous the purpose.

THEME:

An essential concept of the prayer

Extra Help From Heaven

Avoiding *loshon hora*, with its complex inner workings, requires its own prayer for Divine Assistance.

INSIGHT:

Deeper meanings of the theme

The Anatomy of Loshon Hora

In "Word to the Wise," we explained that a special prayer for the avoidance of *lashon hara* is added because the temptation to violate it is very strong. Why is *lashon hara* so hard to control? In reality, speaking *lashon hara* appears to be an almost ludicrous pursuit. A person is usually attracted to sin by some benefit that makes the indiscretion seem worthwhile, at least for that moment. *Lashon hara*, on the other hand, offers no personal benefits. It has no sensual appeal, and confers neither financial gain nor honor upon the person who indulges in it. Given these facts, speaking *lashon hara* appears to be an almost foolish quest.

Rashi (*Devarim* 22:14) declares that a man who hates another will eventually commit slander and warns that "by transgressing the prohibition of 'hating his brother,' one will come to transgress the sin of *lashon hara*." That still leaves a question: what

causes the hatred? In the words of Rav Chaim Vital (*Shaarei Kedushah*, Part 2, *Shaar* 4) "Jealousy causes one to come to hatred". Jealousy arouses vengeance because the jealous person allows himself to illogically believe that the other person's gain is to blame for his deprivation. Rav Mattisyahu Salomon (*Matnas Chaim, Maamarim*, Vol. 1, p. 231) explains that a jealous person is not simply longing for the object of his desires. Rather, he wants vengeance against the one who does possess that object. This sentiment can be seen among young children who fight over a toy; the winner loses interest in the toy soon after taking possession.

Despite jealousy's long reign over the human heart, there are ways to weaken and, ultimately, uproot it from within us. In doing so, we deprive hatred of its fuel, which in turn destroys the impetus for *lashon hara*. At that point, the path is paved for *Geulah*.

VISUALIZE:

Images that bring the prayer to life

The Better Bungalow

For the thirty years of its existence, Summer Dream bungalow colony had been known for its down-to-earth, warm and friendly clientele. "The families here are the salt of the earth," contented residents would say, The bungalows were modest, relatively unchanged from their original construction. Then one summer, the long-time Summer Dream residents arrived to find that one



bungalow – the Doe's – had been completely renovated, Large windows and high ceilings replaced the country cottage structure. The kitchen was nearly industrial sized. Now the residents looked at their formerly "cute" bungalows and saw "shabby." The residents began talking: "The Doe's are show-offs." "Mrs. Doe has

expensive taste." "Mr. Doe is a tax cheat." And so on.

Human nature is such that once we see something better than what we have, we want it. That is why potato chip companies come up with new flavors, and detergent manufacturers come up with new scents. Because this response is so inbred and hard to detect, the Shemoneh Esrei asks Hashem to help us in avoiding the jealousy and *loshon hora* it produces, thus protecting the holiness of our tongues, our prayers and our lives.

Try This!

▶ You have just finished Shemoneh Esrei. Yet the prayers you have recited and the requests you have sent toward Heaven can easily plummet back to earth if the mouth that sent them forth is tainted by *lashon hora*. As you say אלקי, נצור לשוני מרע think of it as insurance for your prayers, so that this and every Shemoneh Esrei will retain its power to bring Hashem's blessings into your life.

Did You Know

▶ **No Interruptions, Please**

A person should not interrupt his recital of *Shemoneh Esrei* to respond to *Kaddish* or *Kedushah* if he is up to the verse יהיו לרצון אמרי פי said before reciting אלקי, נצור לשוני מרע... יהיו לרצון אמרי פי is considered part of *Shemoneh Esrei* proper. (*Siman* 122:1)

On the other hand, if he is already reciting the prayer אלקי, נצור... he may interrupt *only* for the following: *Borchu*, the "amen" said after hearing the הקל הקדוש and שומע תפלה and the words היא שמה רבא and דאמיין בעלמא blessings of *Shemoneh Esrei*, and "amen" said after מברך לעלמי עלמא in *Kaddish*. In *Kedushah*, he may recite the two verses—קדוש, קדוש, קדוש and מודים דרבנן of 'מודים אהנו לך' and ברוך כבוד... He may also say the words מודים דרבנן of 'מודים אהנו לך' and ברוך כבוד... (*Siman* 122:1)