

Tefillah Focus Of The Week:

BIRCHAS HASHACHAR

Donning Our Crown

MEANING: The simple translation of the prayer

Blessed are You, Hashem, our G-d, King of the universe, **Who girds Israel with strength.**
 ...Who crowns Israel with splendor.

ברוך אתה ה' אלקינו מלך
 העולם אוזר ישראל בגבורה.
 עוטר ישראל בתפארה...

WORD TO THE WISE: Meaning within the meaning



Anaf Yosef highlights the use of the word “*Yisrael*” in these blessings, explaining that the underlying subject is the **singularity of the Jewish people and their vital role in G-d’s world**. Hidden within each aspect of the mundane world, there is a spark of holiness. It would have to be so, for each part of creation is a work of G-d. When a Jew, acting according to the dictates of the Torah, interacts with any element of the mundane world, he unveils the spark of *kedusha* embedded within it. As Rav Tzaddok Hakohen (and others) phrases it, he “retrieves the sparks” of holiness that are scattered throughout the material world.

THEME:

An essential concept of the prayer

G-d’s Holy Nation

The people of Israel hold a place of honor and glory as G-d’s holy nation.

INSIGHT:

Deeper meanings of the theme

Standing Apart From The World

Originally, the blessing ‘Ozair Yisroel b’Gevurah’ was intended to be said when we put on our belts (or close the top button of our pants), and the blessing ‘Otair Yisroel B’sifara’ referred to covering the head when dressing (Berachos 60b).

Head coverings of all sorts, and belts of all descriptions are worn by people in many nations of the world. Why do these two blessings of *Birchas HaShachar* relate the donning of these items to such exalted terms as “might” and “splendor?”

The Torah states, “*Dabeir el kol adas Bnei Yisroel v’amarta aleihem kedoshim tih’yu*” (Vayikra 19:2) — “Speak to the whole congregation of the children of Israel and say to them: you shall be holy.” What does it mean to **live a life of holiness**? As we learn from Vayikra Rabbah, the root meaning of the word *kadosh*, holy, is ‘separate.’ Rashi explains that this means **separation from the forbidden**.

Rav Isaac Sher offers another understanding of holiness: **chashivus –importance**. Hashem

emphasized to Moshe that His message of holiness was to be given to the entire congregation. Every one of us is part of the holy nation, meant to stand apart from baseness, coarseness and cruelty. Our status must influence our actions whether we are alone, with our families or at school or work.

As we prepare to meet a new day, we may not feel all that regal. Yet the blessings of אוזר ישראל and עוטר ישראל remind us that we are indeed part of **G-d’s royal family**. When a Jewish man covers his head, he is not seeking to protect himself from wind, rain, cold or sun. He is seeking to **identify himself with G-d’s holy nation**. Similarly, when he “girds himself” with a belt, he is not just putting the last touch on his outfit. He is girding himself with strength – the strength a Jew exercises in **maintaining the self-control** to turn away from the base temptations all around him and within him. In doing so, he brings honor to the nation whose “uniform” he wears, as well as to G-d and the Torah.

VISUALIZE:

Images that bring the prayer to life

Proving Our Pedigree

There was a king who was overthrown and banished from his land. His usurper offered one means by which the king could redeem his throne: if he could **convince the people among whom he wandered that he was indeed a king**, he could return and resume his rule. However, he was not permitted to bring any of his royal clothing or signs of power along with him on his journey.

At first, he tried to convince the people among whom he wandered that he was a



deposed king by simply telling them so. He regaled them with stories about royal life and his great military victories. They all thought he was delusional.

Realizing that words would never suffice to support his contention, he stopped telling his story. Instead, he **conducted himself with the utmost dignity, charity and courage**. Little by little, people began to gravitate toward him, to rely on his judgment and

follow his lead. Ultimately, they realized that he was indeed a king, for his **manner was unmistakably that of a regal person**. He not only regained the throne in his own kingdom, but was crowned by his adopted land as well.

Might and honor are royal attributes. The people of Israel are girded like warriors and crowned like princes. When a person identifies himself as a Jew by his manner of dress, he **declares his royal status to himself**, and thereby **commits himself to upholding it** as he makes his way through the encounters and events that comprise his day.

Try This!

Imagine the feeling a king or queen has upon being coronated. Try to **vividly feel the transforming moment** at which the weight of the crown settles upon the regent’s head, conferring unlimited **honor, power and responsibility**. This week, think of this feeling as you say the words “*ozeir Yisrael b’gevurah*” and “*oteir Yisrael b’tifarah*.”

Did You Know

Out Of Order

One who omitted one of the *Birchas HaShachar* blessings, should recite it upon remembering, because the blessings do not have to be recited in a specific order. However, according to some, the only **exception** is the blessing ‘**Matir asurim**’, Who releases the bound, may not be recited after the blessing ‘**Zokeif kefumim**’, Who straightens the bent, because the concept of ‘releasing the bound’ is included in the concept of ‘straightening the bent’. Therefore, one who skipped ‘**Matir asurim**’ and already recited ‘**zokeif kefumim**’ should preferably listen to someone else recite the blessing ‘**Matir asurim**’. (Mishneh Berurah 46:20)