

Tefillah Focus Of The Week:

BIRCHAS HASHACHAR

Avoiding The Pitfalls

MEANING: The simple translation of the prayer

And may it be Your will, Hashem, our G-d, and the G-d of our forefathers, that ... **and bestow beneficent kindness upon us.** Blessed are You, Hashem, Who bestows beneficent kindness upon His people Israel.

ויהי רצון מלפניך ה' אלקינו
ואלקי אבותינו... ותגמלנו
חסדים טובים. ברוך
אתה ה' הגומל חסדים טובים
לעמו ישראל.

WORD TO THE WISE: Meaning within the meaning



We request that Hashem bestow beneficent kindness upon us. Isn't all kindness beneficent? Eitz Yosef explains that kindness that does not reduce our merit in Heaven is an example of "beneficent kindness." How can one receive Hashem's kindness on this world without diminishing his merit? The Maharsha (on Kiddushin, Daf 29b) explains that any benefit derived from tefillah, no matter how incredible it appears, can be considered natural, since prayer has been an innate part of existence since the time of Creation. Such benefit, since it is not considered a miracle, does not deplete a person's merits.

THEME:

An essential concept of the prayer

It's All Kindness

Hashem's kindness is contained in what He bestows as well as what He withholds.

INSIGHT:

Deeper meanings of the theme

A Gift Held In Trust

Imagine a world in which a mitzvah was clearly and immediately rewarded right here in this world, for all to see. Rav Huna's words in the Gemara present such a world, in which certain mitzvos come with an assurance of certain tangible rewards.

If his description played itself out precisely, every woman who lights her Shabbos candles correctly would have Torah scholars for sons. Every house that bears *mezuzos* that are kosher and properly placed would be a beautiful home. Every man who is careful to wear kosher *tzitzis* would own impressive clothing, and all those who observe Shabbos carefully would possess a winepress overflowing with wine. These are the assertions Rav Huna states unequivocally. Any observer, however, will quickly note that there appear to be a great many exceptions to these statements.

The *Shavet Ha'Mussar* explores the question of why the rewards that are linked to certain mitzvos do not seem to accrue to all those who

scrupulously perform them. He explains that that even where reward is merited, "at times, Hashem sees that the individual will benefit most if He withholds the reward in this world and grants it instead in the World to Come."

For example, wealth can be a great test, and it is a test that many people are not prepared to pass. That is why Shlomo HaMelech said, "Give me neither poverty nor wealth; provide me my allotted bread." The *Mezudas Dovid* and *Ibn Ezra* explain that the verse asks Hashem to give a person that which he requires for sustenance, but no more. If wealth will cause a person to stumble, Hashem may withhold it rather than drag him down to a spiritual low-point.

"Be careful what you ask for," goes the popular saying. For a Jew, however, Hashem is the arbiter of rewards. In Him we can trust absolutely, knowing that what He gives is for our good, and what He withholds is equally for our good.

VISUALIZE:

Images that bring the prayer to life

What You Wish For

If you are like most people, you see what you want in this world and pursue it. And like most people, your judgment as to the ultimate benefit of the thing you want is clouded by one overriding fact: you want it. With that fact as the foundation, you will be blind to the flaws in the object of your pursuit and deaf to warnings that this may do you more harm than good.

Ben's uncle was opening a branch of his successful real estate business in the local neighborhood. Uncle Chaim would need someone to manage the new office, a position Ben



knew would be lucrative. He had the right experience for the job, and so he prayed to Hashem to lift him out of his current mediocre career and give him a new, highly-paid job with Uncle Chaim. Despite the fervor with which he prayed, the job went to someone else. Ben felt that his prayers had gone unanswered, and a good thing had slipped through his fingers.

What Ben did not realize, however, was that the job was in fact not "a good thing". In denying Ben the

job, Hashem saved him from the heart-break of watching his children falter in school as they became distracted by the ever-increasing inventory of electronic toys that would have filled their home. He rescued Ben from the lost learning time that would have been sacrificed to vacations and entertainment, and from the emotionless prayer that would have emanated from his complacent heart.

As in Ben's case, the reward which a person merits is not always something he is equipped to use to his benefit. In withholding what seems to us to be unadulterated good, Hashem's kindness is not so readily seen, and yet, it is still kindness.

Try This!

Imagine your life's journey as a real road with twists and turns, hills and dips, potholes and smooth roadway, all representing the ups and downs, tests and triumphs of your life. There are many forks in the road. This week, when you recite the words of this blessing, ותגמלנו חסדים טובים, ברוך אתה ה' הגומל חסדים טובים לעמו ישראל, feel the confidence and security of knowing that Hashem bestows beneficent kindness upon you.

Did You Know

When To Say Amen

One should not respond "amen" to the blessing "המעביר שנה" ברוך אתה ה' "מעיני" until it has been concluded with the words "הגומל חסדים טובים לעמו ישראל" since this is all one blessing. Some commentators (R' Akiva Eiger) state that the blessing "המעביר שנה מעיני" and the blessing "ברוך אתה ה' הגומל חסדים טובים" are two separate blessings.

Therefore, one should recite "המעביר שנה מעיני" silently so that he not put others in a *safek beracha* situation.