

Tefillah Focus Of The Week:

שמנה עשרה

Asking G-d's Forgiveness

MEANING: The simple translation of the prayer

Forgive us, our Father, for we have erred; pardon us, our King, for we have willfully sinned; for You are the good and forgiving G-d. Blessed are You, Hashem, the gracious One Who pardons abundantly.

סלח לנו אבינו כי
חטאנו, מחל לנו
מלכנו כי פשענו,
כי מוחל וסולח אתה.
ברוך אתה ה', חנון
המרבה לסלח.

WORD TO THE WISE: Meaning within the word



In this blessing, we first ask Hashem סלח לנו and then מחל לנו.

What is the difference between סלח, forgive and מחל, pardon?

The *Siddur Yaivitz* explains that *selicha* means that the sin is not totally erased from Hashem's records, while *mechilah* means that it is. Ramban (Bamidbar 14:17) takes it a step further: *Selicha* means that the sin

is completely extinguished because Hashem forgives us, thereby eliminating our liability for punishment. *Mechilah*, in which G-d pardons us, means that Hashem does not even harbor resentment or ill will towards the sinner.

The final phrase of this blessing—חנון המרבה לסלח, the gracious One Who pardons abundantly—means that Hashem patiently forgives us time and time again.

THEME:

An essential concept of the prayer

Putting It in Words

Verbal confession of sins is necessary to transform *teshuvah* from a feeling into a concrete action.

INSIGHT:

Deeper meanings of the theme

Tell It to G-d

What is the purpose of praying for Hashem's forgiveness and pardon? If a person does not perform *teshuvah*, then how does his prayer help? If indeed he does *teshuvah*, then why must he pray for forgiveness? The answer is that even when a person performs *teshuvah*, it is not complete *teshuvah* unless he verbally confesses his sins to G-d—סלח לנו אבינו כי חטאנו מחל לנו מלכנו כי פשענו, Forgive us, our Father, for we have erred; pardon us, our King, for we have willfully sinned.

Verbal expression intensifies the internal impact of our feelings. Thus, it is logical, at the critical crossroads between sin and repentance, to decisively propel ourselves in the right direction with the power of the spoken word. That is because our minds are a nonstop monologue encompassing thoughts as sublime as remorse and self-improvement, and as mundane as the traffic flow. Thoughts flit through our consciousness helter-skelter, each roosting only until another comes to displace it. Therefore, *teshuvah* must manifest itself in something more than thought.

Asking Hashem סלח לנו אבינו כי חטאנו מחל לנו מלכנו כי פשענו, transfers *teshuvah* from the realm of amorphous thought into reality. It enhances the feeling of conversing with a second party. One must view himself as if he is actually standing before Hashem acknowledging that by sinning, he has rebelled against the King and that he is asking forgiveness. In this way, he can more keenly sense that G-d is aware of his every deed, and that he is accountable before G-d for everything he does.

Confessing requires that the sinner acknowledge the wedge which sin places between him and a loving G-d. By doing so, he removes the sin, and can thus come close to G-d. This explains why confession is part of *tefillah* on Yom Kippur, the day which is the ultimate expression of man's close relationship with G-d.

Despite the power of *Viduy*, it cannot stand alone as *teshuvah*. Without the prerequisites of regret and of forsaking the sin, a verbal confession is just lip service, comparable to a humiliated child's forced "I'm sorry," voiced to please his parents and end the episode.

VISUALIZE:

Images that bring the prayer to life

Making It Real

Yosef sat with his fellow camp counselors planning the color war breakout. He had a great idea, but he was younger than most of the other counselors and a bit shy, too. He didn't speak up. He didn't put his idea into words, and thus it never initiated the exciting, memorable event that could have been.

Raizy read a great story that she thought would really



inspire the fourth-graders she taught. When she got to school the next day and thought about telling the story, she decided against it. There was too much material to cover. Thus, the inspiration the story would have imparted remained under wraps.

Rabbi Kohn had a student who clearly needed some extra encouragement. The rebbe thought of all that he would like to tell the boy to help him find his way, but he didn't feel quite close enough to his student to take on that role. Thus, the transformation he may have fostered did not happen.

Words have the power to turn ideas into an active force in the world. That is the power of confession; it takes our desire for closeness to Hashem and turns it into reality.

Try This!

► Think about a few areas in which you feel deficient in your *avodas Hashem*. Imagine them as boulders blocking the road between your *neschama* and G-d. When you strike your heart and say the words of confession in *Shemoneh Esrei*, imagine the boulders being shattered, leaving you with a clear path on which your prayers can travel.

Did You Know

► *Don't Wait for Me*

In last week's "Did You Know," we learned that although one should not make an interruption while reciting *Shemoneh Esrei*, he is permitted to make gestures with his hands to a crying child so that the child will be silent and not disturb his *kavannah*.

The same considerations apply when a respected person (i.e. Rabbi) is reciting *Shemoneh Esrei* and the prayer leader is waiting for him to finish before saying *Kaddish*, *Kedushah* or repeating the *Shemoneh Esrei* (*chazaras haShatz*). If the respected person's prayer is disturbed by his discomfort at keeping the congregation waiting, he is permitted to make hand gestures indicating to the prayer leader that he should continue the prayer service without waiting for him (*Mishneh Berurah* 104:1).