

Tefillah Focus Of The Week:

BIRCHAS HASHACHAR

Saving Face: Breaking the Brazen

MEANING: The simple translation of the prayer

May it be Your will, Hashem, my G-d, and the G-d of my forefathers, that You rescue me today and every day from brazen man and from brazenness...

ויהי רצון מלפניך ה' אלקי ואלקי אבותי שתצילני היום ובכל יום מעזי פנים ומעזות פנים...

WORD TO THE WISE: Meaning within the meaning



Rebbi (Berachos 16b) prayed after the morning prayer that Hashem save him from “brazen individuals and from the trait of brazenness.” Tosafos (Taanis 7b) explain that a person’s brazenness is a sure indication that he has stumbled in sin and persists in his defiance. The **brazen person is impervious to reproof**, even when it is delivered in the appropriate manner. That is why the Mishnah (Avos 5:20) teaches, “The brazen one goes to *Gehennom*, but the shamefaced one goes to the *Gan Eden*”.

Why is brazenness, “עזות פנים” associated with “*panim*” -- one’s face? The Gemara (Nedarim 20a) explains that the purpose of the awesome phenomena of the Revelation at Mount Sinai was to imbue the Jewish people with the characteristic of shamefacedness, as the verse (Shemos 20:17) states, ‘...So that the awe of Hashem will be on your faces’. This refers to the characteristic of being susceptible to shame. Orchos Tzadikim (Shaar HaBushah) explains that “on your faces” implies a reference to shame, which is discernable on a person’s face. This teaches that shame leads to fear of sin because one will refrain from sin in order to avoid feeling shame before Hashem (Shita Mekubetzes, Nedarim 20a).

THEME:
An essential concept of the prayer

Rescuing Us From Brazenness

Especially in our days of *ikvasa d'Mashicha*, (footsteps of Moshiach) Hashem should rescue us from עזי פנים ומעזות פנים.

INSIGHT:
Deeper meanings of the theme

Starting From Scratch

In *Parshas Lech Lcha* (Bereishis, 15:4) G-d tells Avraham that his nation will be exiled to a foreign land (Egypt), where they will work for 400 years. *Nesivos Shalom* (Devorim, Page 8, s.v. ‘V’zeh hayah’) asks what this servitude accomplished. **Why did G-d take 70 holy souls and place them where their offspring would descend to the 49th level of spiritual defilement?** Furthermore, how could such a spiritual plunge prepare the Jewish nation to receive the Torah at Mount Sinai and fulfill their destiny as the chosen people?

Nesivos Shalom (Devorim, Page 8, s.v. ‘V’zeh hayah’) explains that in order to receive the Torah, the Jewish people had to become completely subservient to G-d. As long as they were filled with their own importance, they were not acceptable for their destined lofty position. Only when they were broken by slavery and holding onto G-d like a drowning man grasps a life-line, would they be open to redemption and revelation.

That is the meaning of the verse (Yirmiyahu 30:7) “*eis tzarah heel’Yaakov meemenah yivashaya*—a time of trouble for Yaakov [the Jews] but from

it will be the salvation.” **There will be a time of trouble, which will “break” any brazenness of the Jewish people.** That time of trouble is not an obstacle, but rather, it is the very soil from which salvation will blossom.

Nevertheless, it can be difficult to understand how the “salvation will blossom” hastening the coming of the Geulah in our generation as each generation grows more superficial and less spiritually sensitive. Even if G-d looks only at the righteous in our generation, what great merit can our comparatively lowly generation show for itself? It is in this regard that the deterioration of society actually helps, by making our feeble efforts more valuable. The fact that it is so much more difficult to achieve spiritual perfection lends that much more merit to our slightest virtues, as “One thing in distress is better than a hundred in ease.” R. Chaim Vital teaches “A very small act in this generation is equal to many great *mitzvos* in others; for in these generations evil is extremely overpowering, to no end, unlike aforesaid!”

VISUALIZE:
Images that bring the prayer to life

Good Jews in Bad Times

“I won’t give you ice cream until you say you’re sorry,” the mother told the unruly children, who were fighting and throwing their food throughout dinner-time. The mother then declared to her friend, “The only way to get these kids to calm down is with a nice surprise, like ice cream for everyone!”

The children are perplexed. Will their misbehavior cost them their ice cream or will it



earn them their ice cream?

The children’s confusion mirrors our own confused understanding of what type of Jewish society will signal the coming of the ultimate reward – the Final Redemption. The Chofetz Chaim (Tzipisa L’Yeshua, Page 5) notes that “The condition for the arrival of the final

redemption...is that the Jewish people will repent,” (Devarim 30:2) and yet, the *ikvasa d’Mashicha* are portrayed as a time of widespread evil, impudence, brazenness and corruption. How can such a society merit redemption?

Chofetz Chaim (Tzipisa L’Yeshua, Page 5) explains that **both evil and repentance will play a role in hastening the final redemption.** As society declines, those who maintain a level of righteousness are all the more treasured. “They will hasten the final redemption.”

Try This! ▶

When a person is corrected or criticized, his first impulse is often to defend himself. However, brazenness, which often manifests itself in an inability to accept reproof, severely stunts a person’s spiritual growth and interferes with his connection to G-d.

Even someone who may not be classified as brazen sometimes falls into this error out of stubbornness or false pride. Imagine such feelings as a stony mask that covers your face and keeps the light of Hashem’s kedusha from reaching you. When you say the blessing asking Hashem to save you from *azus panim*, imagine that mask cracking and falling away, leaving the purer, more sincere and idealistic you standing face to face with your Creator.

Did You Know

▶ Up All Night

There is a custom to stay up the night of Shavuot and learn Torah. This is to rectify the fact that Klal Yisroel overslept the night before receiving the Torah at Mount Sinai and Hashem had to awaken them to receive the Torah (*Mishneh Berurah* 494:1). Staying up all night presents issues with regard to reciting the morning blessings.

One who is awake the whole night recites the morning blessings except for the blessing “אלקי נשמה” and “המעביר שנה” which refer directly to sleep. Instead, one should listen to someone else saying these blessings to fulfill his obligation (Ibid, 46:24). Regarding the blessing ‘על נטילת ידיים’, *Mishneh Berurah* (Siman 4:30; 494:1) suggests that one make sure to use the bathroom before the morning hand washing, thereby obligating himself to say both אשר יצר and על נטילת ידיים.

Regarding the blessing on **tzizis**, two solutions exist. The first is to hear the blessing from someone who has slept and to say “amen” to it. The second approach is to have in mind while putting on the **tallis gadol** to cover both the *tallis katan* and the *tallis gadol* with that one blessing (Ibid 8:42; 494:1).

Regarding **birchas HaTorah** there are two options. The first is to hear the blessings from someone else and say “amen”, after which each person should say a few verses or learn some Torah on his own. The second option is during the blessing of אהבה רבה (before שמע) to have the intention that that blessing will fulfill his obligation to say *birchas HaTorah* (Ibid 47:28).