בס"ד

שְׁמוֹנֶה עֶשְׂ

אבות

אבות

Content Goals:

- *Students will understand why this is the first ברכה in שמונה עשרה.*
- *Students will understand the correct meaning of the beginning of all ברכות– "ברוך אתה ה'".*
- *Students will understand why we are allowed to praise ה'.*
- *Students will understand the meaning of the praises of ה' in this ברכה.*

Hashkafic Goals:

- *Students will understand that we have a personal relationship with ה' that was forged by our great ancestors.*
- *Students will recognize that ה' gives us the ability to speak.*
- *Students will understand that תפילה is a real conversation with ה'.*
- *Students will realize that talking to ה' is a privilege and a gift that we really do not deserve!*
- *Students will understand that ה' is the source of all ברכה.*
- *Students will understand that praising ה' completely is impossible.*
- *Students will internalize that the survival of the Jewish people throughout history is a miracle.*

Social/Emotional or Interpersonal Goals:

- *Students will recognize that the greatness of the אבות means that we have the potential to be great.*
- *Students will consider whether they should or should not be nervous before talking to ה'.*
- *Students will consider how to improve their relationships using the concept of being a גבור.*

Halachic/ Practical Goals:

- *Students will know the הלכות of bowing and כונה related to this ברכה.*

Critical and Creative Thinking Skill Goals:

- *Students will begin to make connections between this ברכה and ones throughout שמונה עשרה by considering places where actions are used to inspire feelings.*
- *Students will compare nervous encounters with new or important people to their תפילה experience.*
- *Students will make connections between this ברכה and their study of the אבות.*

SAMPLE

A. ה' שְׂפָתַי תִּפְתָּח וּפִי יַגִּיד תְּהִלָּתֶךָ

Before we even start the first ברכה we ask ה' to open our mouths. Why?

a. We demonstrate that we are too nervous to talk to the King of Kings and recognize that we are not really deserving of doing so. We ask ה' for His help to speak to Him.

b. We recognize that our ability to speak always is only because ה' gives us the ability to speak. We recognize that we are completely dependent on ה'.

IN THE REBBE'S WORDS

Ideally, an individual should stand in utter בטול before ה'. So great should be his בטול that he is incapable of praying on his own initiative – to borrow a phrase (from תהילים קלט:ד), "There are no words on my tongue." Therefore, the person asks ה' to open his lips and allow his mouth [to] relate Your praise."

Moreover, the term "Your praise" indicates that he is not reciting his own prayer. Instead, it is ה'ס prayer emerging from his lips, as it were. He is like a person repeating after a reader, repeating and drawing down the praise recited in the spiritual realms. On a higher level, it is as if the Divine presence invests itself in the speaker's voice and it is the Divine presence that is speaking. *(Toras Menachem)*

How can knowing that your תפילה is really the תפילה of ה' coming from your lips inspire you to make your תפילה better?

_____

_____

THINK ABOUT IT

Have you ever had a meeting with someone important? Were you ever shy or nervous when meeting someone important for the first time?

Why do you think we don't feel the same way when we speak to ה' during שמונה עשרה? How can sa

Use this as an opportunity to discuss why we are not always focused during שמונה עשרה! How can we change that?

SAMPLE

1. אַתָּה חוֹנֵן

TYING OUR TEFILLA TOGETHER

A. Look at the rest of the בקשות in שמונה עשרה.
Do any other ברכות begin with the word אתה?

No! Why not? Why do we not say אתה רופא חולים or אתה סולח?
Why do we only say אתה חונן?

Think about the three following scenarios:

a. Someone studies very hard for a test and scores a 100%.

b. Someone is very sick and a new medicine suggested by an expert doctor heals the patient.

c. Someone invests money in a risky business deal and makes a profit which is much higher than he expected.

In which scenario is the person most likely to credit themselves instead of ה'? _____

שפתי חיים explains that we tend to recognize ה's hand in healing the sick and providing a livelihood even when we invest in the outcome as well. However, when it comes to knowledge and wisdom we tend to credit ourselves and forget that our minds are a gift from ה'. We say אתה חונן to remind ourselves that even our wisdom is only possible because of ה'.

B. How do you say "give" in לשון הקודש? _____

Why does this ברכה use the word "חונן" to express giving instead?

Use this as an opportunity to discuss the balance between studying and working hard to do well on a test and davening to ה' for help. Perhaps begin saying a short תפילה with students before they begin a test. Encourage them to write their own few lines of תפילה to say.

SAMPLE

בקשה

Consider developing this into an opportunity for students to reflect on their personal talents and showcasing them (perhaps in a "talent show", etc.).

THINK ABOUT IT

It is well known that שלמה המלך was so wise that he even understood the language of animals!

There are different ways that a person can be intelligent. Some people have an understanding of music, some are gifted at math, some can think abstractly, and some have an ability to grasp languages with ease.

What is a kind of intelligence that you have? What is a kind of intelligence that you wish you had or would like to develop?

In this ברכה we ask ה' for more than one form of intelligence.

STORIES FROM THE REBBE

The Alter Rebbe taught another idea about the difference between these three descriptions of wisdom. When someone meditates on ה'ס greatness, they experience a flash of divine wisdom (חכמה). They then work to fully develop this spark of wisdom, exploring it from every angle completely, to truly feel love and awe for ה', they must form a personal connection with the idea, creating a strong mental bond with it (דעת).

In the original Chabad Yeshiva in the town of Lubavitch, the youngest group of boys (after Bar Mitzvah) were entrusted for mentorship to Reb Michoel Bliner. He was an elderly chasid whose very presence was a valuable lesson for the boys in how to be a Jew and a chasid.

He would begin his first lesson each year with the following story. A simple villager received a letter with important information. Being illiterate, he brought the letter to the melamed (teacher), who the villagers hired to educate their children. As the melamed read the letter, the villager fainted.

SAMPLE

בקשה

Can you think of other actions that we do in שמונה עשרה where we also use those actions to help us imagine or feel something?

_____

_____

3. כִּי קֵל טוֹב וְסַלָּח אָתָּה

What tense is used to describe ה'ס forgiving? _____

ה' did not just do so in the past and will not just do so in the future. ה' forgives constantly and as such we use the present tense!

IN THE REBBE'S WORDS

Chassidus emphasizes the importance of serving Hashem with happiness! Being sad or feeling hopeless, even for a short time, can make it harder for us to daven and learn Torah properly.

But you might wonder: "If I did something wrong and didn't follow what Hashem wanted, how can I be happy? Won't Hashem be upset with me?"

The answer is that when we truly feel sorry about what we did wrong and sincerely ask Hashem to forgive us, Hashem forgives us right away! We aren't stuck forever with our mistakes. Hashem gives us the amazing gift to change and make ourselves better at any moment. When we do תשובה and ask for forgiveness, Hashem forgives us immediately.

This isn't just something we hope is true—it's a fact in the Torah. When we say the ברכה asking Hashem for forgiveness, we end by praising Hashem as the One "Who grants forgiveness." Our Sages were very careful about blessings, so they wouldn't have us say this unless they were completely sure Hashem really does forgive us.

Knowing that Hashem forgives us when we do תשובה helps us serve Hashem with simcha, because we can be confident that our תשובה will be accepted!

Adapted from Tanya, Iggeres HaTeshuvah, and the Rebbe's Igros Kodesh; https://www.chabad.org/1618731

Have you ever been בשמחה after doing תשובה? Why do you think you felt that way? _____

_____

SAMPLE

בקשה

STORIES FROM THE REBBE

As one of the Alter Rebbe's wealthy chassidim advanced in years, he was able to marry off his children and establish them in business. A generous man by nature, when the responsibilities of his immediate family became less pressing, he committed himself to pay for the weddings and dowries of his relatives' children.

Suddenly, however, his business affairs took a sharp turn for the worse, and instead of being affluent, he found himself in debt and unable to meet his commitments. Before his financial situation became public knowledge, he hurried to Liozna to receive advice and blessings from the Alter Rebbe.

At yechidus he poured out his heart to the Rebbe, saying that he was prepared to remain impoverished himself, but he needed to pay his debts and honor the commitments that he had made to his relatives.

The Alter Rebbe responded: "You are speaking about what you need. But you have not given a thought to what you are needed for."

The chassid fainted; the Alter Rebbe's attendant had to help him out of the Rebbe's room. When he came to, he began to devote himself to prayer and study, without thinking of his business concerns.

After the chassid had conducted himself in this fashion for some time, the Alter Rebbe sent for him. Standing before the Rebbe, the vision of his previous yechidus flashed in his mind, and he could barely muster the strength to look the Rebbe in the face. This time, however, the Alter Rebbe spoke to him gently: "Now you appreciate ה's truth. You can return home...; may ה' grant you success."

The man made his way home and discovered that the gloomy picture he had seen previously could be corrected. A few favorable strokes of fortune had given him the opportunity to right his financial course.

The sequence is noteworthy. Once he was able to appreciate his purpose, he was granted the means to accomplish it. *https://www.chabad.org/therebbe/article_cdo/aid/78968/jewish/Chapter-1-What-You-Need-and-What-You-are-Needed-For.htm*

What are you needed for? How can ה' support you to accomplish that?

_____

_____

SAMPLE

הודאה

PUTTING THINGS IN PERSPECTIVE

The ברכה of רצה begins the final section of שמונה עשרה. Look at the גמרא's description of the three sections of שמונה עשרה.

ברכות לד.

אָמַר רַב יְהוּדָה לְעוֹלָם אַל יִשְׁאַל אָדָם צְרָכָיו לֹא בְּשָׁלֹשׁ רִאשׁוֹנוֹת וְלֹא בְּשָׁלֹשׁ אַחֲרוֹנוֹת אֶלָּא בְּאֶמְצָעִיּוֹת. דְּאָמַר רַבִּי חֲנִינָא רִאשׁוֹנוֹת דּוֹמֶה לְעֶבֶד שֶׁמְּסַדֵּר שֶׁבַח לִבְנֵי רַבּוֹ. אֶמְצָעִיּוֹת דּוֹמֶה לְעֶבֶד שֶׁמְּבַקֵּשׁ פְּרָס מֵרַבּוֹ. אַחֲרוֹנוֹת דּוֹמֶה לְעֶבֶד שֶׁקִּבֵּל פְּרָס מֵרַבּוֹ, וְנוֹטֵל וְהוֹלֵךְ לוֹ.

רבי יהודה said: One should never ask for his own needs in the first three or in the last three blessings, rather he should do so in the middle blessings. For רבי חנינא said: During the first three blessings, one is compared to a servant who arranges praise before his master. During the middle blessings, one is compared to a servant who requests a reward from his master. During the final three blessings, one compared to a servant who already received a reward from his master and is taking his leave and departing.

What is each section of שמונה עשרה compared to?

1.

2.

3.

How do you think a servant who received a reward should leave his master? What is the appropriate way to leave?

_____

_____

Read the רמב"ם below which we learned at the beginning of our study of שמונה עשרה.

SAMPLE

אלקי נצור

Content Goals:

- *Students will understand that אלקי נצור is a תפילה that is added to שמונה עשרה and why it is added.*
- *Students will understand the need to ask for help with not speaking לשון הרע and why that request makes sense here.*
- *Students will understand the request for help in not responding to verbal attacks.*
- *Students will understand the request for help in תורה study and its placement here.*

Hashkafic Goals:

- *Students will understand the importance of not speaking לשון הרע.*
- *Students will understand the importance of remaining quiet.*

Social/Emotional or Interpersonal Goals:

- *Students will consider how they can be more careful with their speech and how that can improve their relationships.*

בס"ד

שְׁמוֹנֶה עֶשְׂ

אֱלֹקַי נְצוֹר

Halachic/Practical Goals:

- *Students will understand that the יהי רצון at the end of שמונה עשרה allows one to answer קדיש and קדושה.*
- *Students will understand that personal תפילות can be added during אלקי נצור.*
- *Students will know the הלכות associated with taking three steps back at the end of שמונה עשרה.*

Critical and Creative Thinking Skill Goals:

- *Students will notice synonyms describing תפילה and will find meaning in their differences.*
- *Students will consider the comparison made here between ourselves and dirt.*

SAMPLE

אלקי נצור

INSIGHTS FROM THE REBBE

Why are the words וְנַפְשִׁי כֶּעָפָר לַכֹּל תִּהְיֶה followed by the words פְּתַח לִבִּי בְּתוֹרָתֶךָ?

The Rebbe taught that first we ask ה' to help us reach a level of humility and rid ourselves of any arrogance. וְנַפְשִׁי כֶּעָפָר לַכֹּל תִּהְיֶה- our souls should be like dust. Once we reach a level of humility, we are ready to learn and accept the תורה of ה' - פְּתַח לִבִּי בְּתוֹרָתֶךָ! *(Toras Menachem, pg. 363)*

5. פְּתַח לִבִּי בְּתוֹרָתֶךָ וּבְמִצְוֹתֶיךָ תְּרַדֵּף נַפְשִׁי

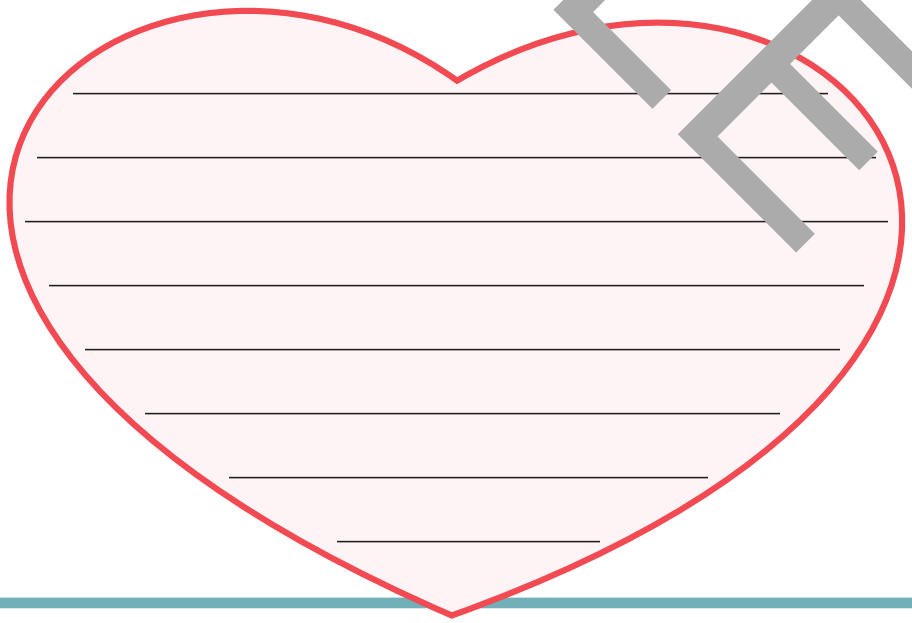
Why do you think we ask ה' to open our hearts to תורה and to help us do מצוות here?

_____

_____

שפתי חיים explains that after we reach such a level of pure speech and not being bothered by insults, we can have a heart ready to learn. We ask that we not only learn תורה but that it penetrate our hearts; that we not only do מצוות but run after them. Rav Hirsch quoted by Rav Schwab suggests that whereas our hearts should be closed to insults, when it comes to תורה our hearts should be open to accept it.

What מצוות do you want to run after? What מצוות do you want to penetrate your heart? Write them in the heart below



SAMPLE