

## THE TWO REASONS TO RECITE אֲשֶׁרִי

1. מסכת ברכות-ד'-ב'- משום דאתיא באל"ף בי"ת

It was a coincidence that last week we studied אֲשֶׁרִי as part of our progress through פסוקי דזמרה and then on מוצאי שבת, we began סליחות by reciting אֲשֶׁרִי. It was further a coincidence that we learned that one of the reasons that we recite אֲשֶׁרִי three times a day is because the first word of each line in אֲשֶׁרִי follows the other in Aleph-Bet order and we then recited the first סליחה which was also composed in Aleph-Bet order. But it is fair to ask whether the Aleph-Bet sequence has more meaning than being a poetic form.

Last week, we learned the explanation of the פני יהושע:

שכל העולם כולו לא נברא אלא לצוות לזה, למי שעוסק בתורה שנתנה ע"י כ"ב אותיות הא"ב.

And from the מהרש"א came the following: דהתורה היא מוזן הנפש והלחם מוזן הגוף

In his book: יסודות התפלה, Eliezer Levy postulates why lines of a prayer sometimes follow in Aleph-Bet order:

ומתוך שהתפלה באל"ף בי"ת התחבבה על העם, שהיה מתפלל תפלותיו בעל פה.

Levy's rationale is a good explanation as to why פיוטים, many of which are recited only once a year, were written in Aleph-Bet order as a memory aide but his explanation does not help us understand why חז"ל felt that אֲשֶׁרִי be recited three times a day because its lines follow in Aleph-Bet order. Any prayer that is recited three times a day will become dear because by reciting it so often, it is easily remembered.

A friend, Moshe Ganz, suggested an answer. In ברוך שאמר and in הודו, we are reminded of the עשרה מאמרות, that the רבנו של עולם created the world simply by mouthing words. The lines in אֲשֶׁרִי remind us that the words that the רבנו של עולם used in creating the world were composed out of the Aleph-Bet.

Let us build on that explanation. A prayer written with each successive line following the Aleph Bet reminds us that our language, Hebrew, is not just another language. It is לשון הקודש. It is the language that is spoken at the highest levels of the heavens. It is what sets Jews apart from the rest of the world. At no time did that become more clear than after the release of Mel Gibson's motion picture, The Passion of Christ, in which he chose to portray those who lived at the time of J. C. as speaking Aramaic. No longer can Jews

claim sole possession of Aramaic. It is now a part of Christian lore.

This is not the first time in our study of תפלה that we have learned the importance of לשון מלאכי. In our discussion as to why קדיש is written in Aramaic, we learned that the מלאכי השרת only speak and understand Hebrew. The significance of that fact is that by praying in the language that the מלאכים speak, we are speaking the language in which business is done in the heavenly world. Our Hebrew words open the door to an exclusive club. Before proceeding to fulfill the mitzvah of קריאת שמע and שמונה עשרה, we recite אשרי to remind ourselves that our prayers enter the heavenly world without translation.

Perhaps חז"ל also wanted to send a message of hope that the Hebrew language would once again regain its place in the world as a living language. Our generation is fortunate for having been able to witness הקמת מדינת ישראל and the re-emergence of the Hebrew language as a living and growing language. We have a responsibility to participate in the revival of Hebrew as a language. A tremendous amount of research is taking place in Israel in all phases of Jewish scholarship, particularly in converting manuscripts and geniza material into book form, all of which is being written in Modern Hebrew. Even תשובות being written by Rabbis in Israel are being written in a sophisticated form of Hebrew. If we want to advance in Jewish learning, we need strong Hebrew language skills, not only in Rabbinic Hebrew but in Modern Hebrew as well. Our schools need to recognize their responsibility to graduate students who are fluent not only in Rabbinic Hebrew but also in Modern Hebrew. חס וחלילה that a time should come when Torah leaders in Israel are able to read ספרים written in both Rabbinic and Modern Hebrew while Torah leaders outside of Israel can only read ספרים written in Rabbinic Hebrew.

## 2. מסכת ברכות-ד'-ב'- אלא משום דאית ביה (תהלים קמ"ה) פותח את ירך.

Why is reciting the verse פותח את ירך ומשביע לכל חי רצון so significant? Our generation more than any generation that preceded us can appreciate the meaning of that verse. We are among the first generations in which the majority of people earn a living using their minds rather than their hands. We are further part of a generation that has experienced an explosion in kosher food production. There were times in Jewish history during which many may have had difficulty reciting פותח את ירך ומשביע לכל חי רצון because their cupboards were bare and their prospects were poor. But we who have jobs in which we earn a living based on the ideas we have and which we can express; who can go into a supermarket and find hundreds of kosher products; who regularly eat pizza; wraps; salsa; Chinese food and now sushi should have no difficulty finding the right thoughts for reciting: פותח את ירך ומשביע לכל חי רצון.