

Morals and Meanings

Parsha Reflections for Living

Rosh Hashanah

Zachreinu LeChaim

The first time we ask Hashem to remember us for life in the *Shemoneh Esrei* is during the opening blessing, with the words *zachreinu lechaim*. This insertion was instituted during the Geonic period, and while it has been an established part of our prayers for centuries, in its time it was met by some authorities with opposition. The basis of the objection is an explicit ruling in the Gemara that states that one should not make requests during the first three blessings of the *Shemoneh Esrei*. These blessings are reserved for praising Hashem, and requests must be reserved for the subsequent blessings.¹

The justification of the insertion at this stage was provided by Rav Hai Gaon.² He explained that when the Gemara says that requests may not be made during the first three blessings, the Gemara is referring to personal requests. However, requests for the public may be made even during those blessings. What is the basis of this distinction? The Tosafos HaRosh explains that when the king is petitioned by his people, it is because they are all in need of his assistance. Therefore, a request made on behalf of the people includes an implicit praise that says, “We all need you.” Hence, asking Hashem to remember us all for life is indeed a form of praise, as it expresses the fact that we are all reliant on Him for our existence and well-being.³

Thus far, we have justified the practice of making this request during the first blessing. Yet still, there is room to ponder: Why put it somewhere where we will then need to justify it, even if we can? Wouldn't it be easier for us to just wait a couple of moments for when

1 *Berachos* 34a.

2 Quoted in Tosafos to *Berachos* *ibid.*, s.v., *al.*

3 *Berachos* *ibid.*

we will be in the middle blessings, and we can then make all the requests we want without having to justify anything!

Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak Bloch, the Rosh Yeshiva of Telz, explains that we cannot afford to delay this first request, for if we do, we may miss a very important point.⁴

“Life” can mean different things, depending on the perspective of the one who is talking about it. It can refer to comfortable physical living, a pleasure seeking or self-centered existence, or it can refer to meaningful idealistic existence. These are a few definitions of the same word, and they are essentially antithetical to one another. This being the case, when we ask Hashem to remember us “for life,” it is crucial to establish what we mean by that term.

The first blessing of the *Shemoneh Esrei* is called *Avos* — fathers. It calls upon Hashem as the God of our fathers, and expresses the fact that our special eternal connection with Him is a product of their elevated and exalted lives. *This* is the point that we need to offer our first request to be remembered for life. For by making this request during this blessing, we are thereby expressing the type of life that we are asking for — a life like theirs! We cannot afford to wait until further on in the *Shemoneh Esrei* where a request for life may take on a more diminished definition, shaped by more mundane characteristics and concerns. We need to register our request now. If there are objections regarding the timing of this request, they can be addressed, but we cannot afford to forgo the full meaning of what we are asking for when we say *zachreinu leChaim*!

May we merit to be signed and sealed in the Sefer HaChaim, for life in the fullest and most meaningful sense of the word, and may the coming year be one of blessing and peace for the whole House of Israel. 🙏

4 *Shiurei Daas*, “*Ori VeYishi*.”