

LEVELS OF APPRECIATION

by Ben Goldberg

Last class we continued looking at the first bracha of Shemonah Esrai and discussed why the bracha is written in the present tense. Today we will continue looking at the bracha, taking a closer look at the next phrase. As a reminder, the first bracha states:

"Blessed are You, Ha-Shem, our G-d and the G-d of our forefathers, G-d of Abraham, G-d of Isaac, and G-d of Jacob; the great, mighty, and awesome G-d, the supreme G-d, Who bestows beneficial kindnesses and creates everything, Who recalls the kindnesses of the Patriarchs and brings a Redeemer to their children's children, for His Name's sake, with love. **O King, Helper, Savior, and Shield.** Blessed are You, Ha-Shem, Shield of Abraham."

Today we will focus on the bolded text – "O King, Helper, Savior, and Shield."

I must confess that I have eagerly been waiting for this class. This specific phrase is one of my favorites, as the message and meaning behind the words is so relevant to our daily lives.

The obvious question as we look at this phrase is why we use four different adjectives in describing Ha-Shem. Why refer to Him as a King, a Helper, a Savior, and a Shield? Wouldn't one description be enough, especially since King appears to be the loftiest title of the four? There are numerous answers to this vexing question but I'd like to share my favorite.

Imagine you are walking down a street late at night when, out of the blue, a man steps in front of you brandishing a weapon. Panic rips through your body as you realize that, at best, you are going to lose all of your money and valuable possessions. You don't even want to imagine the worst-case scenario. Suddenly, however, a cop car that was parked on the street pulls up and apprehends the man, leaving you no worse for wear. How thankful you would be to G-d! You would sing His praises and it would be quite a while before you forgot this incident. This obvious instance of G-d's kindness is when He is acting as a King.

Now imagine you are walking down a street late at night but make it home safe. The next morning, you read in the paper that, no more than five minutes after you left that street, a man was mugged! You may not feel the same sense of relief, the same acute awareness of G-d's presence, as you would in the first example but you would nonetheless thank G-d for keeping you out of harm's way. This level, slightly removed, is an example of G-d acting as a Helper.

Now return to our familiar example. After making it home safe, the next morning you read in the

paper that a man had been mugged one street over from you! Once again, the level of relief and awareness of G-d's kindness may be slightly reduced but you remain thankful, ever cognizant of your close call. This is an example of G-d as Savior.

Finally, imagine a man who intended to mug everyone who walked down your street at night is arrested on an unrelated charge at 9 a.m. that morning. You will never know that, had that arrest not happened, you would have been mugged or worse! G-d has saved you but you have no awareness of this beneficial act. This final level is G-d as Shield.

Though the example was quite long, the take-away message is rather short. There are times in life where we can clearly see G-d's hand guiding events in our favor. Other (and maybe most) times we never see all of the good done on our behalf. As we go about our day, let's remember to thank Ha-Shem for the constant good He is doing on our behalf – even if we never get the chance to see it.