

THE DEEPER MEANING OF ATTRIBUTES

by Ben Goldberg

Last class we continued looking at the first bracha of Shemonah Esrai, focusing on the third phrase and taking a deeper look at why we list out each name of the forefathers in our prayer. Today we will continue looking at the first 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 – "the great, mighty, and awesome G-d, the supreme G-d."

After having described G-d through the prism of our relationship with him (noting that He is our G-d and the G-d of our forefathers as well), we now turn to specific attributes, noting that He is great, mighty, awesome and supreme. Is there a deeper meaning to these attributes?

Rav Dessler notes in Michtav M'Eliyahu that "great" refers to Ha-Shem's chessed, His kindness that He constantly bestows upon us. "Mighty" refers to His might in judgment, in the perfect justice that He metes out. "Awesome" refers to His presence as seen through the beauty in the world around us and that we refer to G-d as "supreme" to state that He is the One true ruler.

As we pray, we should think about how we can best emulate these attributes. Just as G-d is great with His kindness, we should strive to be kind to others. Just as G-d metes out perfect justice, we should work to make sure we act with self-control, even when we feel overwhelmed with anger. And we should ensure we are noticing and appreciating the awesome beauty in the world around us.

Of course, there are times when things may not be going well in our lives, when striving for kindness and self-control seems too hard. There may be times where we struggle to see G-d's might or awesomeness. This particular phrase in our prayers offers us a chance to change our perspective. The Talmud (Yoma 69B) tells us that Moses first described G-d as great, mighty, and awesome while the Jews wandered the desert but that Jeremiah omitted the word "awesome" in his own prayers after witnessing the destruction of the Bet HaMikdash. After the prophet Daniel later observed the oppression of Jewish exiles, he omitted the term "mighty" from his prayers. However, the Anshei

Knesset HaGedolah, the Men of the Great Assembly, later restored it. They decreed that a new perspective on the events of the past was needed. Where is the might of Ha-shem as our enemies oppress us? It's in the self-control He shows by not immediately punishing those deserving of it. Where is His awesomeness in the wake of the destruction of the Holy Temple? The proof is the presence of our nation! If not for His awesomeness, how could such a tiny nation not only survive, but thrive?