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Birchot Hashachar IV

As the losing baseball team neared the final inning of the game, the coach took a moment to gather the team together for a last-minute pep-talk. He looked the players in the eye and said to them – "You can do it!! You have the strength, you have the energy! Wake up and step up to the plate with dignity! We are the winning team!!". And with that, the team took their place at the dugout. With that boost of inspiration ringing in their ears, they each took their turn at bat with renewed confidence and pride, ready to face the other team and emerge victorious.

The above scenario really encapsulate the final section of Birchot Hashachar. The last four brachot are like that last-minute peptalk before we go into the day! As we encounter myriads of issues and difficulties throughout the day, we can keep these words of inspiration in our heads, giving us that extra boost of energy to be able to succeed.

ברוך אתה ה' אלוקינו מלך העולם אוזר ישראל בגבורה

Chazal originally recommended that one recite this bracha while fastening his belt in the morning. This is because a belt signifies the separation between the upper part of the body (the head, the heart, the neshama) which represents the spiritual, from the lower part of the body which represents the physical. In this bracha, we are praising Hashem for giving us the strength to overcome our physical desires and our evil inclination. There's a famous saying in Pirkei Avot – איזהו גבור הכובש את יצרו - *Who is strong? One who overcomes his Yetzer Hara.* This is the type of strength we really need at the start of a new day. We need Hashem to gird us with a special strength, with the ability to do what's right throughout the day, despite the pull to do otherwise. (Gemara Sukkah 52b) Throughout the day, we are faced with hundreds of dilemmas like – should we get angry or remain calm? Should we spend our time well or waste it? It's not easy to be strong in the face of temptations but this bracha is telling us that Hashem is with us and with His support, we can do it!

ברוך אתה ה' אלוקינו מלך העולם עוטר ישראל בתפארה

This bracha was originally instituted to be said as one puts on his turban (Kippah). The idea here is that we wear something on our head to remember who we are and who is above us. I would venture to say that a woman's headcovering can also help to accomplish the same goal. When we remember who we are and what our role is as the Jewish people, we can take pride in the fact we have been crowned with glory and splendor. We are the children of the King!

ברוך אתה ה' אלוקינו מלך העולם הנותן ליעף כח

We need to thank Hashem every day for the renewed strength He gives us at the start of the day. No matter how exhausted

we were the night before or how overwhelmed we might have felt yesterday, in the morning we are recharged and rejuvenated, ready to face the day's challenges with renewed vigor. In addition, there are many times when we somehow manage to accomplish the impossible - we look back at what we have done, despite limits in manpower and time, and we realize that without Hashem giving us that extra energy boost, our success would have been virtually impossible. We need to recognize this and remember Who is really enabling the realization of our achievements.

ברוך אתה ה' אלוקינו מלך העולם המעביר שינה מעיני ותנומה מעפעפי

In this last bracha, we begin with praise to Hashem for removing both sleep and drowsiness from our eyes. The Gra explains that שינה refers to when one is in a very deep sleep and תנומה is referring to when we are very tired and our eyes are starting to close but our minds are still very active. The idea here is that we are thankful for the alertness and clarity that Hashem has given us.

The Siach Yitzchak writes that the beginning of any operation determines what the outcome will be. If we start off on the right foot, then we will continue upwards from there. As we begin the day, removing all vestiges of drowsiness and lethargy, and we begin new thought processes and deliberations, we are at a significant crossroad - where will our thoughts lead us? Which direction will we go in? And so, we jump immediately into the paragraph ...יהי רצון שתרגילנו בתורתך where we ask Hashem to lead us in the right direction. We will iy"H focus next week on this יהי רצון. ■



