

A Daily Prayer with Special Significance at This Time of Year: *V'hu Rachum*

Dr. Rivkah Teitz Blau

וְהוּא רַחוּם is a verse about G-d's mercy that we repeat every day but is especially meaningful now. It comes from *Tehillim*, Psalm 78:38:

<p>He is full of compassion, forgiving iniquity and not destroying; frequently. He turns away His wrath, not stirring up all His anger.</p>	<p>וְהוּא רַחוּם כִּפֵּר עוֹן וְלֹא יִשְׁתִּית וְהִרְבָּה לְהֵשִׁיב אָפּוֹ וְלֹא יִעִיר כָּל־חַמְתּוֹ</p>
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We depend on G-d's mercy as we go through life. We make mistakes and we do not realize our ideals. Yet, we count on His kindness.

This verse is the mid-point of the Book of Psalms; it is an appropriate place to reflect on our relationship with Hashem, the theme of the entire *Sefer Tehillim*. In the 72 verses of this poem we review the wonders G-d has done for us: the miracles in Egypt; dividing the waters of the sea to let us pass safely; providing a cloud to lead us in daytime and a fire at night; and causing water to flow from a rock. We also recall our response. We complained; we didn't like the food; we were thirsty; we even made a golden calf. My *chavrusa*, Eliana Tieke, pointed out that the golden calf is the best sign that our sins can always be forgiven. If Hashem allowed us to recover from that offense, there is hope that if we repent, we may still be His nation.

This may be the reason we say this verse so often: before *ma'ariv*, the evening prayer; in *Tachanun* on Monday and Thursday; at *shacharis*, the morning prayer, three times—in *Hodu l'Hashem*, before *Ashrei*, and in *U'va l'Tzion*. Look at the verses that follow each morning. At the first mention, the verse that follows is "You, Hashem, withhold not your mercies from me; Your kindness and truth always protect me" (Ps.40:12). For the second, "Hashem, save; may the King answer us on the

day we call" (Ps.20:10). The verse following the third repetition is "For You, Hashem, are good and forgiving, and abundantly kind to all who call upon You" (Ps.86:5). These *pesukim* are a prelude. They enable us to turn to G-d. We count on His kindness.

The verse immediately after 78:38 offers a summary of human existence that elicits compassion: "He remembered that they were flesh, a wind that passes and will not return." The fragility of mankind, the ephemeral quality of our lives, calls for understanding. We may make choices that we regret.

Hashem gives us chances to correct them before we are gone. We have all acted in ways we wish we could undo. We have all made remarks that haunt us. In Psalm 19:13 we ask "Who can discern mistakes? Cleanse me from unperceived faults." We wish we had not erred. But as we begin each new day reciting these verses, we put yesterday behind us and depend on G-d's mercy to start afresh.

Similarly, on the New Year day, we recite them again. We put the past behind us and depend on G-d's kindness as we look forward to better choices in the year ahead!

כְּתִיבָה וְחִתִּימָה טוֹבָה