



olami

INSPIRING JEWISH
GREATNESS

THE AMIDAH PRAYER EXPERIENCE COMPANION

EXPLAINING
THE BLESSINGS
OF THE
SHEMONEH ESREI

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The Amidah Prayer Experience Companion

Explaining the Blessings of the Shemoneh Esrei

Overview

Tefillah (prayer) is one of our most powerful spiritual connectors. In *The World of Prayer* (p.13), Rabbi Eliyahu Munk, citing the Zohar, explains that the Shemoneh Esrei is *the* climactic moment of tefillah. It is during this tefillah, as we stand in silent prayer in the presence of G-d, that we reach the highest rung on the Heavenly ladder, the עולם האצילות – the world of pure spirit.

The wording of the Amidah, composed by Prophets and Sages, is far more profound than what anyone today could compose. Each word of these berachot bears great importance, and we invest valuable time expressing them and responding “amen” to their repetition daily. As such, this handbook comes to offer insight into each of the nineteen berachot, helping us appreciate them and heighten our overall prayer experience.

The Amidah Prayer Experience Companion is divided into three chapters that lead us through the three main sections of the Shemoneh Esrei, as categorized by the Talmud and Rabbinic codifiers: (1) the opening three blessings of praise, (2) the thirteen middle blessings of requests, and (3) the three concluding blessings of thanks. Educators can print out the Companion in installments or in its entirety to pace their classes and/or chavrutah study.

[The Olami Morasha classes](#) entitled “The Jewish View of Prayer,” “Overview of the Amidah I - The Establishment, Structure, and Purpose of the Amidah,” and “Overview of the Amidah II - The Way to Pray – In Thought and Action” are suggested prerequisites to this Companion. Rabbi Avraham Edelstein’s comprehensive [Commentary on the Weekday Siddur](#) informs much of the material in this Companion. To elucidate his *Commentary*, Rabbi Edelstein includes extensive quotations from the Talmud, Rishonim and Acharonim in Hebrew footnotes; we have often incorporated both, adding English translations to the Hebrew text.

Prologue

Preparing for a Conversation with G-d

I grew up in Milwaukee, which in those days was a minor-league town. But never mind, I still loved baseball. It cost a quarter to get in to Borchert Field.

My hero was Ted Gullic, number 22. He batted cleanup and was known as “old reliable.” After the game we would rush down to catch the players before they went into the clubhouse and try to get an autograph. One time I actually caught Ted Gullic and asked for his autograph. “Will you hit a home run for me tomorrow?” I asked.

Ted looked me over, noticing my yarmulke (skullcap) and said, “You pray for me, and I’ll hit for you.”

The next day I listened to the game and waited for the announcer to say, “There he goes!” bailing Ted Gullic’s homer, but it didn’t happen. Ted got a double and a single that day, that’s all. In the postgame broadcast from the clubhouse, called Tenth Inning, Ted said, “I tried my hardest. I guess the kid that prayed for me didn’t pray hard enough.”

I have never forgotten Ted Gullic’s reprimand. Today I pray for things much more important than a home run, such as for sick people to get well, and since I believe in the power of prayer, I try to pray even harder. This incident was a defining moment in my spirituality; it taught me that people do count on our prayers and that it matters to pray with all your heart for the person who needs you. (Rabbi Abraham J. Twerski, M.D., Do Unto Others, Andrews McMeel Publishing, pp. 163-164.)

Whether our heartfelt prayers are for others or ourselves, one thing is true: It’s all about having a conversation with G-d. And creating dialogue with G-d takes work.

1. Rabbi Reuven Leuchter, Creating Dialogue with Hashem, pg. 7 – Because of the times we live in, we are not used to the spiritual work that proper prayer requires.

Our day and age can aptly be described as an era of unprecedented scientific and technological advancements. While many of these advancements have benefited mankind, they have also spoiled us somewhat by fostering an “instant everything” mentality. We have become accustomed to getting things instantly, from global travel and communications to microwaves and fast-food chains to instant pain relief. Our attention span, patience and imagination have dwindled, to the point where we mistakenly believe that the end result is infinitely more significant than the process it took to get there.

As a result, we’ve lost the meaning of what it means to “work.” A young child growing up these days does not know all the mechanics involved in, say, operating an elevator – he learns that by simply pushing a button, the elevator takes him where he wants to go. This example can be taken as a metaphor for how ignorant we are about what it means to work hard; we push buttons, and are oblivious to the effort which should be exerted.

This is antithetical to the spiritual work ethic of Judaism. We are rewarded – and held accountable – for the effort we exert in something, regardless of its outcome. The *Mishnah* (*Avot* 5:27) states, *l’fum tza’ara agra*, “the reward is given according to the effort exerted.” We are here to work, as the verse in *Iyov*/Job (5:7) states, *adam l’amal yulad*, “man was created to toil.” The process

is just as important as – if not more than – the end result.

Part of this process is learning to expand our perspective.

2. Ibid., pg. 8 – Praying correctly demands that we look beyond ourselves and realize that we are part of a larger picture.

...With the advent of so many innovations in telecommunications, it is very easy to send out messages to anyone and everyone, harder still to hear – and listen to – what anyone else has to say. There is such a cacophony of information out there that we don't know how to receive the messages intended for us – specifically, the messages G-d sends us through His world.

Meaningful prayer requires us to take some time out from our fast-paced lives, to rise above our “me”-ness and to connect to a higher plane, and to recognize that our needs, and the role we play in this world, are an integral part of a much larger picture: G-d's Master Plan.

Once we see ourselves as part of a bigger picture, we can view prayer as a means to connect to G-d.

3. Ibid., pp. 9-12 – Effective prayer does not mean that our requests have been fulfilled, rather that we have interacted with G-d.

When we insert money into a vending machine, we expect immediate results. If we're disappointed because the machine malfunctions, we file a complaint with the company and in response get a letter of apology and a caseload of free drinks. We assume that prayer works in a similar fashion – we pray, and get what we want; if we don't, we conclude that our prayers didn't work and that we must simply pray harder...

This view is as limited as it is limiting because by maintaining that all we need to do is put our requests before G-d, we are attributing much too much power to ourselves, not realizing that, ultimately, the power is in G-d's hands, not ours. The goal of prayer is not merely to obtain the fulfillment of our needs. Rather, the goal is to interact with G-d, which in turn will lead to personal transformation...

When we pray, we enter into a *masa u'matan*, an exchange or discourse, with G-d. When we make our requests, we state our needs from our perspective, and G-d listens. But we also relate to His perspective and thereby come to see our own requests in a different light. It is no longer a selfish expression of our personal needs, but a genuine dialogue with G-d. Imbued with the awareness that G-d is interested in what we need and ask for, our prayers take on a new meaning and significance...

Prayer is a dynamic and transformational encounter with G-d, anchored in the expression of our concrete, earthly needs and at the same time is extraordinarily elevating, allowing us to transcend our limited realities and connect to the Divine Plan for the world. It is not merely about putting our wish list before G-d, but is actually a dialogue taking place between us and G-d, a vehicle of open communication, premised on the recognition that our well-being is a matter of mutual concern – our concern and G-d's concern. Acknowledging this leads to personal transformation through prayer, whereby we can now see ourselves and our needs as part of a much larger, infinitely more complex picture of the world.

Unlike other efforts people make in order to achieve a goal, prayer has a guaranteed successful outcome, because the goal is the connection with G-d.

4. Ibid., pp. 13 and 17 – The difference between effort and prayer.

We have many ambitions and aspirations, both in the short and long term. We exert much effort to actualize these ambitions and aspirations and reach our goals. This often leads to a widespread error in how we approach prayer. We tend to think of prayer as merely another type of *hishtadlus*, effort, grouping it together with all the various efforts we exert in order to achieve our life's goals.

Imagine a businessman who undertakes numerous tasks to ensure the success of his business. He researches market opportunities, obtains expert advice, launches a marketing campaign, hires a group of talented professionals, and so on – all the while maintaining that his greatest effort and greatest hope lies in praying to G-d. Prayer, he asserts, is the real reason for his success. We would be impressed by such a person – and rightfully so – for he appears to have reached a high level of faith and a deep understanding of the power of prayer, as evidenced by the fact that he attributes more value to the effort invested in prayer than to any other type of business acumen.

The truth, however, is that prayer and *hishtadlus*, effort, are not synonymous, and in fact are very different in nature. Prayer is not in the realm of effort, and bears no resemblance to it. All the efforts we exert in pursuing our aspirations and goals are shrouded in doubt. The nature of the world is such that our efforts may or may not make a difference, they may or may not achieve the intended result. In contrast, prayer is completely free of doubt; it is an act based on certainty...

Prayer...is nothing like effort which may or may not prove fruitful. Prayer has a guaranteed outcome because G-d is interested in our needs, and wants to bestow His goodness upon us. It isn't just another address to approach in an effort to fulfill our needs. Prayer is engaging G-d in, so to speak, a face-to-face dialogue – a personal and dynamic encounter. We present G-d with our requests from **our** perspective. We discuss them with Him, we even argue with Him over them. In turn, G-d's presence is evident in our lives, and when we feel His presence, the outcome will definitely be the best possible bestowment of goodness upon us, because His ultimate desire is to bestow goodness upon His creatures.

5. Ibid., pg. 25 – Prayer requires preparing for a meeting with G-d Who absolutely cares about us.

Praying with such consciousness requires adequate preparation. Before praying, one needs to reflect on the essence of the prayer experience, namely, that he has an appointment with the One Who cares about his needs and unquestionably wants to provide for him. It is recommended that this preparation be done by reflecting on oneself and one's **personal** life rather than the usual "textbook" learning of prayer, for prayer is an individual matter, based on one's own life experience and not a repetition of some standardized presentation of a wish list.

To further understand how to change prayer from a mere wish list to a dialogue with G-d, including insight to G-d's perspective, see Rabbi Reuven Leuchter, *Creating Dialogue with Hashem*.

Introduction

Structured Prayer or Informal Expression?

We are about to embark on an exploration of Judaism's most seminal prayer, the Shemoneh Esrei. This prayer takes center stage in all three weekday prayer services, Shacharit, Minchah, and Maariv. The first question we must address before we begin this journey is why structured prayer is necessary in the first place. Why doesn't Judaism tell us to pray in our own words? Why should we repeat over and over again a standardized text written thousands of years ago? Doesn't such rigidity stifle the free-flow expression of our thoughts to G-d?

The truth is that both praying to G-d informally and praying to G-d within the formal structure of the Shemoneh Esrei are encouraged. (Moreover, there is plenty of room for personalized expression within the Shemoneh Esrei itself, as we will see.) Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler explains that the essence of a person's inner yearnings is considered prayer.

1. Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler, Michtav M'Eliyahu, Volume III, p. 68 – Essence of the soul is prayer; all of one's aspirations are expressed in prayer.

<p>What is meant by the term <i>nefesh</i>? This is prayer, as it is stated, "And I will pour out my soul (<i>nafshi</i>) before G-d" (Shmuel/Samuel I 1:15). Therefore the essence of the human soul is prayer. And the explanation of this subject is as follows: Every aspiration of a person is intrinsically prayer because it is characteristic of a person that any strong aspiration he has is expressed within his heart and also by his lips in prayer.</p>	<p>ומה היא הנפש, זו תפלה, שנאמר ואשפוך את נפשי לפני ה'. הרי שמהות הנפש היא תפלה. וביאור ענין זה: כל שאיפה הרי היא ממילא תפלה, כי כך היא תכונת האדם, ששאיפתו החזקה מתבטאת בפנים לבבו וגם בשפתיו - בתפלה.</p>
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Consequently, even when a person speaks informally to G-d, that too is an expression of prayer. Rabbi Berkovitz suggests that depending upon the type of person, one form or the other will be easier for a person. Nevertheless, both means should be utilized to reach out to G-d.

2. Rabbi Yitzchok Berkovitz, The Jerusalem Kollel, Class on Real Emunah, October 2013 – Speaking informally and praying formally to G-d.

How do you connect emotionally to your Torah and mitzvot? You can't really connect emotionally to your Torah and mitzvot unless you first have a relationship with G-d. Meaning, when you're davening (praying), you feel you're talking to Him.

There are two approaches to developing an emotional relationship with G-d, depending on what you're made of. The first approach is outside of the structure of the Shemoneh Esrei – have a good (informal) schmooze with Him. Talk your heart out. In the Shemoneh Esrei it is more difficult to do that because you didn't write the script. Talk to Him. I'm sure you have something to cry to Him about, maybe even something to thank Him for. In the olden days you had to hide to do this because people thought you were crazy (seemingly talking to yourself), but today they'll just think you have a Bluetooth in your ear. If you do this regularly enough, it becomes clear to you that He's really there. And He listens. How to catch His response is another issue.

For some people, they feel awkward doing that – they need something formal, within a structure or framework. So they should learn the parts of davening, using the venue for prayer for which it was made. The easiest part of davening to do that is *Pesukei D'zimra*. Sing to Him. But you have to study it first. Ultimately, do the same with Shemoneh Esrei.

Really, a wise approach is that you can do both: you can speak to G-d informally throughout the day and daven (pray) to Him (formally) in the Shemoneh Esrei. That is going to develop an emotional relationship with G-d – and it really works.

When one davens the Shemoneh Esrei, following the basic format for prayer is crucial – without this structure our minds might wander onto frivolous and trifle matters. The Shemoneh Esrei keeps us focused on matters of eternal importance. Most importantly, they were redacted with prophetic knowledge and Divine wisdom.

3. Rabbi Yitzchok Kirzner and Lisa Aiken, The Art of Jewish Prayer, pg. 10 – The prayers in the Amidah are of eternal, universal relevance for the Jewish people.

When the Men of the Great Assembly redacted the prayers of the Amidah, they did so with prophetic knowledge and Divine wisdom. This granted them the ability to see what would happen to the Jewish people throughout history until the time when the Mashiach (Messiah) would come. This foreknowledge allowed them to compose the prayers that Jews would need to say in all future generations in order to maintain their vital connection with G-d, both individually and as a nation. They were able to discern, in ways that we frequently are not, what Jews in every generation would require in order to flourish emotionally, intellectually, materially and spiritually.

Additionally, we might struggle to formulate the precise thoughts we wish to express, whereas a standardized text provides a springboard for our own expression. As Rambam writes, “The fixed prayer was established to enable those who had difficulty expressing themselves, to pray with clarity.”

Furthermore, we must not forget that the words of the Shemoneh Esrei were composed by no ordinary people. The composers of the prayer’s text were great sages, some of them even prophets. Focusing upon these holy words, we have the opportunity to delve into their meaning and find our own deepest thoughts there below the surface.

4. Rabbi Chaim Volozhin, Nefesh HaChaim, pp. 327-328 (See also Ruach Chayim 1:2.) – The wording of the Amidah, composed by Prophets and Sages, is far more profound than what anyone today could recite.

Our Divine service today consists of prayer instead of sacrifices. Prayer stands at the most exalted place of the universe, and each word rises to an exceedingly high place... For this important purpose, 120 elders, among them several prophets, composed it... They put particular *kavanot* (intentions) into the prayers and established them in such a manner that everything would be included in them, so that

עבודתנו היא רק התפלה, במקום זבח ומנחה, והדברים עומדים ברומו של עולם. וכל תבה ותבה עולה למקום גבוה מעל גבוה... וכי לא לחנם ק"ך זקנים, ומהם כמה נביאים יסדו... המה כווננו בה, ותקנוה, על אופן, שתהיה הכל כלול בה. וכל איש ישראל, כל אחד מתפלל כפי הבנתו...

<p>each Jewish person may pray according to his understanding.</p> <p>From the day the prayers were established, the world has not seen two similar prayers that have had the identical effect Above and risen to the same level. For today's prayer is different from that of yesterday, and everything is dependent on these words [which were fixed for us for every prayer]. Therefore, prophecy was necessary for this.</p>	<p>מיום שנתקנה, לא היה בעולם ב' תפלות שיעשו רושם שווה למעלה, ושיעלו למדרגה א', כי משונה בזה תפלת היום מתפלת אתמול כי יעבר, והכל תלוי בתבות אלו. ולכך הוצרך נבואה לזה.</p>
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5. Rabbi Avraham Edelstein, Commentary on the Weekday Siddur, Ner Le'Elef Books, pg. 4 – Prophecy and Ruach Hakodesh (Divine Inspiration) enabled the Great Assembly to establish the prayers.

The Nefesh HaChaim reveals to us the incredible depth of meaning contained within the prayers of the Siddur. It is true that we have many commentaries and explanations written by the Rishonim through to the Arizal, who revealed to us an amazing depth of the meaning of the prayers, and we are fortunate to understand something of what they have written. But all of their explanations are but a drop in the ocean compared to the true depth that the Men of the Great Assembly inserted into the prayers. For there were 120 of these Sages, all of them with deep understanding and several of them prophets. No one man could ever have achieved their wondrous and awesome achievement to include and embed in the format of a permanent and orderly single version of prayer all the *tikunim* (spiritual impact) of all the upper and lower worlds and all the contents of the Holy Chariot in such a way that every time one prays one causes new tikunim and effects changes in the order and forces of the universe.

The Sages of the Great Assembly had to take into account that from the time they made these prayers until the coming of Mashiach, no prayer would ever be repeated in exactly the same way. Each person is different every time of the day and every day of the year. Our moods are different; our needs and our spiritual level are different as well. Therefore, any time we wouldn't fully capture the potential of that moment through the prayers would be lost forever.

Knowing all of this, it was only possible for the Sages to make fixed prayers because of the high levels of prophecy and Ruach HaKodesh which they merited to have at that time. It was literally a case of G-d placing in their mouths the specific words of the prayers with all the tikunim embedded within them.

Our words may be the same every time we recite the Shemoneh Esrei, but no two prayers are ever the same. The thoughts and feelings that we allow these berachot to evoke and the meaning we invest within them will be different every time. The goal of this handbook is to explain the structure and meaning of the weekday Amidah, in order to help us express ourselves through the ancient and holy words of the Shemoneh Esrei. (For more insight into why prayer became standardized with the flexibility of personal expression and requests, see the Morasha shiurim on "The Jewish View of Prayer," Section IV, Part A. and "Overview of the Amidah I - The Establishment, Structure, and Purpose of the Amidah," Sections I and IV.)

“Shemoneh Esrei” means eighteen, in reference to the original eighteen blessings of which this prayer is composed. Since numbers are not considered arbitrary in Judaism, it is worthwhile to examine why the composers of this most significant prayer chose to establish eighteen blessings. The Gemara cites three parallels: 1) In Tehillim (Psalms) 29, King David mentioned G-d’s Name eighteen times, 2) The Shema also mentions G-d’s Name eighteen times, and 3) The spinal column contains eighteen vertebrae. (The nineteenth blessing, which was added later in Jewish history when many heretic factions had proliferated, will be discussed in its place.)

Getting Started: Taking Three Steps Forward:

Each time we stand up to pray the Shemoneh Esrei, we first take three steps back, beginning with the left foot, and then three steps forward, beginning with the right foot, modeling ourselves after Yehuda (Judah) who boldly approached Yosef (Joseph) in Egypt, in order to protect his younger brother, Binyomin (Benjamin). The commentators explain that we are demonstrating our wish to imitate Yehuda, who taught us that when there is an issue that needs to be taken care of, one must step forward. Furthermore, the Rokeach explains that the steps forward relate to the Hebrew word *vayigash*, to approach, which appears three times in Tanach:

6. Ibid., pg. 116 – Taking three steps forward is based on Avraham, Yehuda and Eliyahu HaNavi (Abraham, Judah and Elijah the Prophet).

Three times a day, at the beginning of each Shemoneh Esrei, we take Yehuda’s step as one of three, illustrating that his step was not only towards Yosef but provides us with a permanent model of how to approach spiritual greatness at the same time.

The *Rokeach* points out that the word *vayigash*, to approach, appears three times in Tanach. Each one involves an appeal:

- a- Avraham appeals to G-d to save the people of Sedom (Bereishit/Genesis 15:23)
- b- Yehuda appeals to Yosef not to take Binyamin into captivity (Bereishit 42:18)
- c- Eliyahu on Har HaCarmel: (Melachim I: Chapter 18)

Each one of these three approaches gives us another foundational principal of prayer:

- a- Avraham Avinu teaches us that we have to daven even for evil people;
- b- Yehuda teaches us that all Jews are responsible for one another, and that this principle must be reflected also in our davening;
- c- Eliyahu HaNavi teaches us that we have to daven for *Kiddush Hashem*, sanctifying the Name of G-d, i.e. we need to realize that even Kiddush Hashem, which seems dependent on our actions, comes from G-d. He gives us the strength and inspiration to go through with such an act to begin with.

Each one of these three learned from the previous one and added a dimension. Each one added an approach:

Yehuda learned from Avraham Avinu to take responsibility for others, but he added that it is not only the *Gadol HaDor* (the leader of the generation, i.e., Avraham Avinu) who is responsible; rather, we are all responsible for one another. (Eliyahu learned from Avraham and Yehuda but added that, ultimately, when we take responsibility for each other, it is rooted in the responsibility we are taking to produce Kiddush Hashem in the world.)

Chapter One

The Introductory Berachot of Praise

The nineteen blessings of the Amidah are divided into three sections: praise, requests, and thanks. The Talmud (Berachot 34a) states that in the first three blessings we liken ourselves to a servant praising his master (upon whom he is dependent for everything) before he dares request anything from him (which are the middle blessings). In the last three blessings we act like a servant thanking his master for what he has received (or with complete confidence that the master will fulfill his requests) and then taking leave of him.

As we begin reciting the Shemoneh Esrei, we recognize that without G-d's assistance, it is impossible to accomplish anything in life, let alone pray to G-d.

אֲדֹנָי שְׁפָתַי תִּפְתָּח וּפִי יַגִּיד תְּהִלָּתְךָ (תהילים נא:יז)

My G-d, open my lips so my mouth may declare Your praise. (Tehillim/Psalms 51:17)

Rabbi Avraham Chaim Feuer, Shemoneh Esrei (ArtScroll), pg. 40 – The key to effective prayer.

This introductory verse is the key to effective, successful prayer. It did not appear in the original version of the Amidah, because in earlier generations even simple Jews were capable of concentrating intensely on their prayers. However, with the passage of time people paid less and less attention to G-d throughout the workday, and so they had to struggle to focus their minds on Him at prayer time. Therefore, the Sages of later times inserted this verse from Psalms as a special prayer to be able to pray (*Kedushas Levi, Parshas Va'eschanan*).

Berachah 1. אבות (Avot) – Forefathers

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְיֵשׁוּעָנוּ. אֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ. אֱלֹהֵי יִצְחָק. וְאֱלֹהֵי יַעֲקֹב. הָאֵל הַגָּדוֹל הַגִּבּוֹר
וְהַנּוֹרָא אֵל עֶלְיוֹן. גּוֹמֵל חֲסָדִים טוֹבִים. וְקוֹנֵה הַכֹּל. וְזוֹכֵר חֲסָדֵי אֲבוֹת. וּמַבִּיא גּוֹאֵל לְבָנֵי בְנֵיהֶם לְמַעַן שְׁמוֹ
בְּאַהֲבָה:

מֶלֶךְ עוֹזֵר וּמוֹשִׁיעַ וּמַגֵּן: בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ. מֶגֶן אֲבֹתֵינוּ:

Blessed are You, L-rd, our G-d and G-d of our forefathers, G-d of Avraham, G-d of Yitzchak, and G-d of Yaakov; 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, G-d, Shield of Avraham.

We begin the Shemoneh Esrei by invoking the names of our forefathers, the founding fathers of the Jewish religion: Avraham (Abraham), Yitzchak (Isaac), and Yaakov (Jacob).

Part A. אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְאֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ – Our G-d and G-d of Our Forefathers

Why was this *berachah* (blessing), which focuses on the forefathers, designated to introduce the Shemoneh Esrei?

1. Rabbi Avraham Chaim Feuer, Shemoneh Esrei (ArtScroll), pg. 53 – We must relate to G-d in two ways, with our own intellect and through our received heritage.

Our G-d and the G-d of our forefathers. First we call Him *our G-d* because we are obligated to serve and know Him to *our* fullest capacity. But there is much about His ways that we cannot understand. In response to this lack of clarity we proclaim that He is *the G-d of our forefathers*, and we have complete faith in the tradition they have transmitted (Dover Shalom). Similarly, the Israelites sang G-d's praise after witnessing the wondrous splitting of the Sea of Reeds: *This is my G-d and I shall praise Him, the G-d of my father and I shall exalt Him* (Exodus 15:2).

While it is important to relate to G-d as our own personal G-d, the focus of this introductory blessing is clearly on the heritage of our forefathers. Why is the connection to our ancestors so important that they need to be mentioned at the outset of the Amidah prayer?

Relating to G-d in a personal way as a descendant of our Avot has a long history. When our ancestors sang to G-d in appreciation of the Splitting of the Sea they mentioned this connection.

2. Shemot (Exodus) 15:2 with Commentary of Rashi – The Jewish people crossing the sea refer to G-d as the “G-d of my father.”

My strength and song is G-d, and this is my deliverance; This is my G-d and I will glorify Him, the G-d of my father and I will exalt Him.	עזי וזמרת יה ויהי לי לישועה זה אלי ואנוהו אלהי אבי וארממנהו:
<i>The G-d of my father:</i> I am not the beginning of the sanctity [i.e., I am not the first to recognize His sanctity], but the sanctity has been established and has remained with me, and His Divinity has been upon me since the days of my forefathers. — [from Mechilta]	אלהי אבי, לא אני תחלת הקדושה, אלא מוחזקת ועומדת לי הקדושה ואלהותו עלי מימי אבותי:

3. Rabbi Zev Leff, Shemoneh Esrei, pg. 21 – We must relate to G-d in light of our Jewish heritage.

The function of the introductory praise of G-d before commencing our supplications is to acquaint ourselves with G-d, to be able to recognize and appreciate to Whom we are directing our prayer. This recognition begins with our *Avot* and their relationship with G-d. At the Red Sea, where Bnei Yisrael came to a profound recognition of G-d and declared, “This is my G-d, and I will glorify Him,” they immediately continued with “the *G-d of my father*, and I will extol Him.” Rashi explains that this implies that the recognition of this greatness did not begin with me, but rather is a tradition that began with my forefathers. Any authentic appreciation of G-d, any genuine relationship with Him, cannot be removed from the context of the unbroken chain of Jewish history and tradition. Hence, *Avot* forms the foundation of our Amidah.

Even G-d refers to Himself as the G-d of the Avot. That is how He tells us we should refer to Him.

4. Shemot 3:15 – G-d says He should be addressed as the G-d of the Avot.

And G-d then said to Moshe, “So shall you say to the Children of Israel, ‘The L-rd G-d of your forefathers, the G-d of Abraham, the G-d of Isaac, and the G-d of Jacob, has sent me to you.’ This is My Name forever, and this is how I should be mentioned in every generation.”	ויאמר עוד אלהים אל משה כה תאמר אל בני ישראל יקוק אלהי אבותיכם אלהי אברהם אלהי יצחק ואלהי יעקב שלחני אליכם זה שמי לעלם וזה זכרי לדר דר:
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5. Mechiltah, Parshat Bo – G-d tells Moshe that the Jewish people should address Him as the G-d of the forefathers.

From where do we derive that we must say, “Blessed are You, G-d, our G-d and G-d of our fathers, G-d of Abraham, G-d of Isaac, and G-d of Jacob”? From the following verse: G-d then said to Moshe, “So shall you say to the Children of Israel, ‘The L-rd G-d of your forefathers, the G-d of Abraham, the G-d of Isaac, and the G-d of Jacob, has sent me to you.’ This is My Name forever, and this is how I should be mentioned in every generation.” (Shemot 3:15).	ומנין שאומרים ברוך אתה יי אלהינו ואלהי אבותינו אלהי אברהם אלהי יצחק ואלהי יעקב שנאמר ויאמר עוד אלהים אל משה כה תאמר אל בני ישראל ה' אלהי אבותיכם אלהי אברהם אלהי יצחק ואלהי יעקב [שלחני אליכם זה שמי לעלם וזה זכרי לדר דר] (שמות ג טו).
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As we mentioned above, the first three blessings of the Amidah come to offer praise to G-d before we express our requests of Him. But how is this berachah in which we call upon the names of the Avot considered praising G-d? What aspect of G-d are we praising by calling Him “the G-d of our forefathers”?

6. Rabbi Yitzchak of Volozhin, Peh Kadosh – By invoking the Avot we are praising G-d for the kindness He showed them.

Imagine a pauper who is ignorant of Torah. His clothes are old and tattered and he also is suffering illness. In the pauper's hometown lives a very wealthy and generous man, but the pauper is afraid to approach him for help. “How can I ask him to hire a teacher for me so that I can learn Torah? How can I ask him to pay for a doctor to cure my illness, and for new clothes and my other needs? He is liable to answer that he is not my relative, and I should first seek help from members of my family!” Chances for a positive response are greater if the pauper introduces his request by saying, “I have heard that it is in your nature to open your hand to the needy and generously supplied their needs. In many ways, you helped my father and my grandfather. I respectfully request that you continue with such heartfelt kindness and help me, as well, in my difficult times.”	משל לעני אחד ע"ה גדול שהולך בבגדים קרועים ובלוים שפרחה בו הצרעת ותגדל עניו מאד וירא איש עשיר אחד וילך אליו ויבקש מאתו כי ישכור בעדו מלמד ללמדו תורה ורופאים לרפאותו מצרעתו ויען העשיר ויאמר מה לך ולי כי באת אלי הכי קרובי אתה בן משפחתי או מחותני. אבל אם כה ידבר אליו העני אז יהיו דבריו נשמעים. הן אתה אדוני זה דרכך לעשות צדקה וחסד וגם לאבי ולזקיני עשית טובות רבות ועצומות ע"כ בקשתי מרוב טובך שתעשה גם עמדי אות לטובה.
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<p>The meaning of the verse: “So shall you say to the Children of Israel, ‘The L-rd G-d of your forefathers, the G-d of Abraham...’ this is My Name forever, and this is how I should be mentioned in every generation,” is that when someone wants My Name to be mentioned in connection to him, and that I should fulfill his request, he should mention this Name in prayer, saying that I am the G-d Who was kind to his forefathers. In every generation people should mention the merit of the forefathers in their prayers to me.</p>	<p>וזה שאמר הכתוב כה תאמר לבני ישראל אלהי אבותיכם אלהי אברהם וגו' זה שמי לעולם וזה זכרי לדור דור. פירוש כשאדם רוצה שיזכר שמי עליו ושאעשה בקשתו יזכיר לפני שמי זה לאמר שאני האלהים שעשיתי חסד עם אבותיו ובכל דור ודור כשמתפללים לפני יזכירו זכות אבות.</p>
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Part B. The G-d of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov

The institution of structured prayer was based on two sources: 1) the establishment of the prayers by the Avot, and 2) as a replacement for the Tamid (daily) sacrifices which ceased after the destruction of the Second Temple. In the beginning of our discussion of Berachah 19 below, the Temple Service, we will explain the significance of the establishment of prayer by the Avot and the relationship between prayer and *avodah* (sacrifices). Here, we specifically explore how understanding and identifying with the spiritual accomplishments of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov are key to utilizing the Amidah to communicate one's needs to G-d and to actualize one's personal mission.

1. Rabbi Avraham Chaim Feuer, Shemoneh Esrei (Artscroll), pg. 51, 55 – Each of the Avot perfected a unique path to G-d.

The mission of the *Avot* was to attract mankind to G-d's service, and each Patriarch had a unique approach. Abraham showered people with hospitality to give them a taste of G-d's boundless lovingkindness. Isaac trembled in incessant prayer and penitence and gave mankind a glimpse of G-d's awesomeness. Jacob was profoundly scrupulous in revealing G-d's attribute of truth.

Abraham represents *chesed* (kindness), the desire to seek out the welfare of others. Such a person takes G-d Himself as his role-model and, like the Creator, desires to give and share everything he possesses. This trait is similar to *mercy*, but there is a difference between the two terms. The merciful person is aroused to help only after he learns of another's suffering. The *chesed*-oriented person, on the other hand, is self-motivated, constantly searching for new opportunities to benefit others. The *merciful* person seeks merely to solve problems and alleviate suffering. The *kind* person wants to help every man achieve success and good fortune, even if he has not been suffering.

Isaac represents the attribute of *gevurah*, strength, or as it is often called, “*fear*” of G-d. Whereas Abraham's service was outwardly directed, Isaac's mission was internal. Such a person is driven by a fear of transgression and a powerful drive for self-perfection. Isaac constantly subjected his every deed and desire to an exacting standard of purity and excellence.

Jacob dedicated himself to the characteristic of *truth*, which seeks to combine *chesed* and *gevurah*, kindness and strength, in the proper balance. Indulgent kindness and love can lead to undesirable

excess, while self-critical *strength* can lead to stifling despair. The man of *truth* finds the middle course between these two extremes, creating a harmonious mixture.

What do the Avot have to do with *our* prayers?

2. Rabbi Noson Weisz, Prayer Works, pg. 99 – Identifying with the Avot is the first of two pillars of prayer.

Identifying with the Patriarchs is fundamental to our relationship with G-d. It is one of the pillars that uphold the efficacy of our prayers, for it is through the efforts of the Avot that the channels of prayer were opened. The Talmud hints at this concept when it informs us, “The prayers were established (*tiknum*) by the Patriarchs” (Berachot 26b). The rough translation of the word *tiknum* as “established” omits an important nuance of the Hebrew word’s meaning.

Tiknum is a verb form of the word *tikun*, which can mean to repair something that is broken or, as more commonly used, it can mean rabbinic ordinances, called *takanos*. The latter meaning actually draws from the same root as the first, since rabbinic ordinances are intended to maintain the Jewish nation in good repair. As used in the Talmudic passage, the word *tiknum* refers to the first meaning. The Avot did not issue an ordinance mandating prayer. Rather, they repaired the disrupted connection with the Almighty through which prayer flows (interrupted by the generations after Adam HaRishon who either defied G-d or were misguided by pursuing *avodah zarah* - idol worship).

All prayer is based on relationship. Unlike Psalms, the Amidah is based on our relationship with the Almighty as subjects of *Malchus Shamayim* (Kingdom of Heaven). We have crowned Him King, but He does not relate to us solely in that role, for He is called *Avinu Malkeinu* – our Father, our King. He doesn’t just rule as a monarch, but rather, He listens to our pleas as a Father. He is a King, but a loving King Whose power defines His relationship with us and provides the governing principle of His *Malchus*. Nevertheless, we still call upon Him as our King, and in doing so, we acknowledge that He not only has the loving desire to help us, but the limitless power to do so.

This loving relationship between G-d and the Avot preceded the establishment of *Malchus Shamayim*, and is in fact the foundation upon which the *Malchus* was built. From what does this love spring? A hint of its essence is revealed when G-d decides to disclose to Abraham His plans to destroy the sinful cities of Sodom and Gomorrah:

“And G-d said, ‘Shall I conceal from Abraham what I do, now that Abraham is surely to become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall bless themselves by him? For I have loved him, because he commands his children and his household after him that they keep the ways of G-d, doing charity and justice in order that G-d might then bring upon Abraham that which He had spoken of him’” (Genesis 18:17-20).

Avraham’s spiritual accomplishments created our capacity to achieve them as well.

3. Ibid., pp. 101-102 – The paradigm of Avraham enables us to influence G-d in running the world.

G-d loves Abraham, the individual, but G-d’s reasoning for including Abraham in this momentous decision is that “he commands his children and his household after him.” In cultivating the next generation’s relationship with G-d, Abraham demonstrates that he considers the relationship to be everlasting. He devotes his life to ensuring that this unique bond will endure long after Abraham, the

mortal man, has left the world.

To establish everlasting relationships that can change the world in a permanent way, we must teach our children to carry on the tasks that we only have time to begin during our brief life span. Abraham's commitment to teach his children G-d's ways is much more than a normal parental desire to raise fine, upright, and moral children; it is essential to the relationship he wants to establish with G-d.

The exchange between Abraham and G-d regarding the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah provides a paradigm for the way our daily prayers function. The striking characteristic of this exchange is that the omnipotent, eternal G-d consults a mere mortal – Abraham – about his decision to destroy the cities, and more outrageous still, this mere mortal fights like a lion in opposition to G-d's decision:

Abraham came forward and said, "Will You then obliterate the righteous with the wicked? Perhaps there are fifty righteous people in the midst of the city; would You then obliterate and not spare the place for the sake of the fifty righteous people who are within it? It would be sacrilege for You to do such a thing, to bring death upon the righteous with the wicked; so the righteous will be like the wicked. It would be sacrilege to You! Shall the Judge of all the earth not do justice?" (Ibid, 23-25). How could Abraham, the great believer, have called G-d's wisdom into question? Because Abraham was the first person since Adam to fully recognize himself as a *tzelem Elokim* (created in the image of G-d), along with all that title entails, he also realized that G-d had endowed human beings with the power to exercise a certain amount of input into Divine decisions before they are executed.

4. Ibid., pp. 102-103 – The license to express ourselves in the Amidah flows from our being descendants of Avraham.

Had the Almighty made a unilateral decision to destroy Sodom, and Abraham had read about it in the next day's newspaper, he would have accepted the decision with perfect faith that it reflected the ultimate wisdom. Before that point, however, man as G-d's partner in the running of the world, has a say. This is all the more so when G-d Himself comes to consult man regarding His decision. Abraham was essentially saying, "Since You asked me for my opinion, I have to tell You that I am opposed."

The remainder of the passage is a record of a breathtaking bargaining session. In the end, the Almighty agrees to all of Abraham's demands and requests for mercy. He will not carry out the edict of destruction unless all of Abraham's conditions are fully met, for He wants Abraham to accept His decision as perfectly just.

It is this same license to influence G-d's running of the world that defines the purpose of the Amidah and makes it the essential and powerful prayer that it is. Although G-d does not come to consult us regarding His decisions, as He did Abraham, He solicits our input. This He does by commanding us to pray. Through the specific supplications we are commanded to recite within the context of the Amidah, we express our opinions to G-d about what this world needs in order to run. We utilize the license G-d has granted us out of His love for Abraham. It is a license that never expires, because Abraham's commitment to G-d extends throughout the generations of his descendants, whom he "commanded after him."

5. Ibid., pp. 104-105 – Reciting the Amidah acknowledges Divine guidance of the world and is our input into G-d’s decision-making.

Although we do indeed ask for practical, personal benefits when we recite the Amidah, the purpose of those petitions is to acknowledge that G-d is the sole source of everything we need, and that His *Hashgachah Pratit* – Divine supervision of every facet of life – is the sole cause of everything that happens.

We – Abraham’s children – have a job to do, which is to perform our generation’s part in perfecting the world, and our prayers to G-d are the only way we can acquire all we need to complete the task. We are commanded to pray as a means of guaranteeing us input into the Almighty’s decision-making process, and thereby fulfilling our Divinely appointed role.

6. Ibid., pp. 130-132, 137 – Tefillah is the means to activate Divine Guidance, which will provide the resources necessary to enable our personal *Tikun Olam*.

The world as we now know it is called *Olam Hazeḥ* – This World. The world as it will be when the Almighty’s chesed is able to pour forth upon it without limit is called *Olam Haba* – the World to Come. We know that the pain and evil present in *Olam Hazeḥ* are necessary tools in G-d’s plan to create a relationship with the *tzelem Elokim* based on free choice...

Our task in life is to draw fresh Divine energy into this world by penetrating the iron curtain of “Mother Nature” and choosing to acknowledge and call upon G-d as the Master of the Universe. This is the work of *tikun haolam* – repairing the broken world of *Olam Hazeḥ*.

Each time we ignore and reject the attraction of evil, pierce the veil of G-d’s concealment, and apply our energies to reconnecting the physical world to its spiritual source, we accomplish this task in a small way. Our effort brings a new supply of chesed into the universe, healing its wounds and filling its voids. As we gradually draw the unobstructed flow of fresh chesed energy into *Olam Hazeḥ*, we provide the remedy for the problems built into it, helping to transform it into *Olam Haba*...

Olam Haba is not a destination somewhere beyond. It is here, where we stand, we must build it from the raw material of *Olam Hazeḥ* by constantly seeking to enrich and uplift our physical world with fresh supplies of Divine chesed. The greater our effort, the greater is the flow of chesed, and the closer the world comes to reaching complete *tikun haolam*...

If *Olam Hazeḥ* comprises the building materials for *Olam Haba*, then it is clear that the size and quality of this eternal structure depends on the size and quality of the materials we are allotted for the job. Tefillah is the means by which we requisition these supplies.

Tefillah activates *Hashgachah Pratit*, the Divine Providence with which G-d orchestrates each individual’s life. Each person’s prayers are answered according to his individual needs for his unique task in life. One who is using those resources to carry out his assigned *tikun haolam* receives from G-d all he needs to do the job.

What is meant by the expression *Elokei Yitzḥak*, the G-d of Isaac? *Elokei Yitzḥak*, the G-d of Isaac, represents full, wholehearted dedication of oneself to fulfilling one’s purpose. This is symbolized by the *Akeidah*, or the sacrifice of Isaac, when Isaac was fully aware and agreeable to the mission.

7. Ibid., pp. 139-140 – *Elokei Yitzchak* enables us to plead our case before having achieved tikun haolam.

Isaac symbolizes the idea of dedicating everything you are, totally and without reservation, to the accomplishment of your assigned task. When Isaac was a young man of 36, with his entire life ahead of him, his father Abraham informed him that the Almighty wanted Isaac to sacrifice his life. Isaac not only consented to surrender his life, he consented with utter joy.

What was the source of his joy? It was so clear to Isaac that the only purpose of life in Olam Hazei was to accomplish his assigned tikun haolam that he delighted in the news that he had already accomplished his task and G-d was ready to receive him into Olam Haba. In fact, he understood that his tikun was this very episode – his demonstration of a human being's willingness to give up his life at the Almighty's command.

Isaac was the perfect exemplar of this principle, for he was a person of such quality, influence, and lineage that he might easily have felt that his death would set back, rather than advance, G-d's goals for the world. He had been sent into this world equipped for the exalted position of the second Patriarch of Judaism. Nevertheless, the moment the Almighty directed him to play a different role, he dropped his other aspirations. Only he could successfully demonstrate that the purpose of life was not to actualize one's ambition, no matter how lofty and seemingly virtuous, but to accomplish one's assigned tikun.

This gives Isaac unique moral authority to plead the case of one who has not yet achieved the tikun haolam the Almighty expects of him. It is as if Isaac were saying to G-d, "For your sake, I was willing to give up my expectations for my own life's achievements, and I am only a man. Surely You, the Almighty, can defer Your expectations of Your children's achievements."

Through the channel established by Isaac, we can come before G-d and offer our side of the argument; we are trying, but we are imperfect, and our lives are beset by pain and confusion. Through Isaac, we are able to plead that our case be considered with understanding and mercy, with the focus on the obstacles we face rather than on the talents we were given.

The Almighty is called *Elokei Yitzchak* because when we interact with Him in His aspect of *din* (judgment), we do it through Isaac. Isaac's perfect manifestation of the meaning of *din* opened the channel that allows us to request our daily needs from G-d even though we rarely make perfect use of what we are given. Once Isaac made his mark on the world, G-d no longer made unilateral decisions regarding *din*. Rather, He listens to our side of the story before deciding how much *chesed* we deserve to receive.

What is meant by the expression *Elokei Yaakov*, the G-d of Jacob?

8. Rabbi Noson Weisz, *Prayer Works*, pp. 146-147, 159 – Prayer demonstrates that we accept the model of Divine Providence epitomized by Jacob.

Elokei Yaakov describes the relationship to Hashgachah Pratit that Jacob epitomizes. We must be able to discern G-d's hand in the events of our lives if we are to remain focused on the spiritual realities that operate behind the scenes to create our physical reality. Through the revelation of the Divine Presence that is designated by the name *Elokei Yaakov*, we avoid being sidetracked by cause-and-effect thinking, and turn our attention instead to the issues that truly determine the outcome of

our efforts...

To help us to successfully engage with hashgachah, the Almighty gave us two spiritual tools. These are **emunah** – belief in G-d – and **bitachon**, the willingness to entrust one's life to His hands. The greater one's emunah and bitachon, the more clearly one sees G-d's hand operating behind the scenes. Hashgachah is visible to the person who believes in it, for the Almighty has no need to hide from someone who already lives with an awareness of His presence. To the person who lacks emunah and bitachon, however, hashgachah is nearly invisible.

Nevertheless, every member of the Jewish people comes into the world with the seed of emunah already implanted within him. We are fully formed in the Almighty's image (*tzelem Elokim*) and therefore, the knowledge of His existence is an integral part of our self-awareness. We need not create our emunah from scratch; we must merely labor to nurture it and bring it to full bloom... When we pray, we display our acceptance that the principle of hashgachah determines every aspect of our lives. While one may not have arrived at the spiritual level to perceive hashgachah in every instance, our tefillah proves that we accept that this is the way the world operates. By reaching out to G-d to request what we need, we prove that we know He is the source of it all. Our prayers travel along the other side of the two-way bridge built by Jacob (symbolized by the ladder in Bereishit/Genesis 28:12). G-d's message comes to us in hashgachah, and our opinion of what we need to respond to His hashgachah goes back to Him through tefillah. Without the attributes of *Elokei Yaakov*, the act of prayer would be a futile exercise.

Now that we have seen the importance of tapping into the spiritual accomplishments of the forefathers, which helps us focus on communicating our needs to G-d via the Amidah, we can ask a further question: Why does the Amidah repeat the phrase “G-d of” for each of the Avot rather than simply stating, “the G-d of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov?”

If the purpose of these words was to communicate that each one of these three generations of Avot faithfully served G-d, then indeed it would have been enough to write: “the G-d of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov.” But the full expression as we have it comes to teach us that each one of the Avot approached G-d from a different angle. Each one had a relationship with G-d which started from his own unique personality and character – and yet each, despite his different starting point, achieved a holistic perspective of G-d.

9. Rabbi Meir Eisenstadt, *Panim Meirot* 1:39 (Translation by Yissachar Dov Rubin, *Talelei Orot Prayer Anthology, Volume II, pg. 629*) – Each of the Avot found his own way to G-d.

Why is the word “G-d” repeated? Why not say it just once – “G-d of Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov?”

The answer lies in the instructions that Dovid HaMelech (King David) gave to his son, Shlomo (Solomon). We read (Divrei HaYamim/Chronicles 1:28:9), “And you, Shlomo, my son, know the G-d of your father, and serve Him wholeheartedly, with a soul full of desire.” A Jew is not to believe in G-d simply because his father

למה אנו אומרי' אלהי אברהם אלהי יצחק ואלהי יעקב ג'
פעמי' אלהי והי' סגי בפעם אחד לומר אלהי אברהם
יצחק?

אמרתי להשיב לך טעמו של דבר ע"פ נגלה דהא מצינו
דאמר דוד לבנו בדברי הימי' סי' כ"ח פסוק ט' ואתה
שלמה בני דע את אלהי אביך ועבדהו הפירוש הפשוט
שאינן לאדם להאמין באלוה מצד מנהג אבותיו כי זה מנהג
האומות אלא מצד החקירה ע"פ תורתנו הקדושה שהוא
אל הבורא יתברך ויתעלה שמו ולכך אמר דע את אלקי
אביך מצד החקירה.

<p>did. That is the way of the gentiles. Rather, every Jew is obligated to use his intellect to seek out G-d according to the wisdom and guidelines of the Torah. So said Dovid to his son, “Know the G-d of your father,” and thereby “serve Him” as is fitting.</p> <p>Avraham is known as the first to use his intellect to reach recognition of the One G-d. Everyone around him worshipped idols, but he exposed the false deities and taught humanity the true belief about Creation and reality.</p> <p>If the Amidah were to identify the Holy One as “G-d of Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov,” it would leave room for a mistaken impression – that Avraham succeeded in coming to know G-d through his intellect, but Yitzchak and Yaakov did nothing more than mimic him. They contented themselves in following in his ways, trusting that he was right. To belie this notion, our Sages instituted that we say in the blessing about the <i>Avot</i>, “G-d of Avraham, G-d of Yitzchak, and G-d of Yaakov” – to emphasize that each of the Patriarchs, through his own efforts, achieved clear recognition of the Holy One. Each one pondered, reasoned and investigated, using his own mental faculties, and served the Holy One accordingly.</p>	<p>ומצינו באברהם שהוא היה חוקר ראשון אלהותו והוא הודיע אלהותו בעולם כי בימיו היו עובדים לעכו"ם.</p> <p>ואם היינו אומרים אלהי אברהם יצחק ויעקב הייתי יכול לומר שאברהם הי' חוקר ראשון שחקר אלהותו ויצחק ויעקב בניו סמכו על אמונת אבות ומנהגם ולכך אנו אומרים אלהי אצל כל אחד ואחד כדי להודיע שכל אחד מצד עצמו עמד על החקירה ומצא שאין אחד אלא אלהינו והוא חיזוק אמונתינו הקדושה.</p>
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We should reflect upon the fact that each of the Avot served the One G-d out of clear knowledge of Him, having investigated the matter thoroughly using his own talents and faculties, and not as a matter of dogma and mimicry (Talelei Orot).

Part C. האל הגדול הגבור והנורא – The Great, Mighty, and Awesome G-d

1. Devarim (Deuteronomy) 10:17 – Moshe used these three terms to describe G-d.

G-d your L-rd is the ultimate Supreme Being and the highest possible Authority. He is the <i>great, mighty and awesome</i> G-d...	כי יקוק אלהיכם הוא אלהי האלהים ואדני האדנים האל הגדל הגבר והנורא...
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These three terms refer to three of G-d's traits that we are praising at this point.

2. Recanati, Commentary to Devarim 10:17 – Three attributes of G-d.

“The great” refers to the attribute of kindness, “the mighty” refers to the attribute of strength, and “the awesome” refers to the attribute of mercy.	הגדול רמז למדת החסד, הגבור למדת הגבורה, והנורא למדת הרחמים.
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Moshe had used these terms to praise G-d, but later in history the last two – mighty and awesome – were omitted by the prophets. In light of the tragedies of Jewish history, the destruction of the Temple and the dispersal of the Jewish people to foreign lands, it became difficult to see G-d's might and awesomeness. In composing the Amidah, the Men of the Great Assembly reestablished the use of these praises of G-d by viewing these aspects of G-d in a new light.

3. Talmud Bavli, Yoma 69b – The Men of the Great Assembly earned their title by finding new meanings to the ancient terms Moshe used to praise G-d.

<p>Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said, “Why were they called the Men of the Great Assembly? Because they restored the crown of G-d’s glory to its original luster. Originally, Moshe had said, ‘the great, powerful, and awesome G-d’ (Devarim 10:17), but then Jeremiah came along and said, ‘Behold, strangers are croaking in His sanctuary (a reference to Nebuchadnezzar entering the Temple – Rashi). Where then are the displays of His awesomeness?’ (and hence in Jeremiah 32:18 he leaves out the word <i>awesome</i> – Rashi); then Daniel came along and said, ‘Behold, strangers are enslaving His children, the Jewish people, so where then is His power?’ He therefore did not say ‘powerful’ when he prayed.</p> <p>“But then the Men of the Great Assembly came along and said, ‘To the contrary! This is the magnificent display of His strength, for He restrains Himself in that He shows forbearance to the wicked (all the years that His people are subjugated and despite all the oppressive decrees issued against them, and does not punish them – Rashi); and these are indeed the great displays of His awesomeness, for were it not for His awesomeness how could one nation survive amongst all the other nations of the world?!’ The Men of the Great Assembly, therefore, reinstated mention of these attributes in their prayer.”</p>	<p>אמר רבי יהושע בן לוי: למה נקרא שמן אנשי כנסת הגדולה - שהחזירו עטרה ליושנה. אתא משה אמר (דברים י) האל הגדל הגבר והנורא, אתא ירמיה ואמר: נכרים מקרקרין בהיכלו [שראה שרי נבוכדנצר נכנסין להיכל ומריעים בו ככל רצונם], איה נוראותיו? לא אמר נורא [”האל הגדול והגבור ה' צבאות שמו” (ירמיהו לב)]. אתא דניאל, אמר: נכרים משתעבדים בבניו, איה גבורותיו? לא אמר גבור.</p> <p>אתו אינהו ואמרו: אדרבה, זו היא גבורת גבורתו שכובש את יצרו, שנותן ארך אפים לרשעים. ואלו הן נוראותיו - שאלמלא מוראו של הקדוש ברוך הוא היאך אומה אחת יכולה להתקיים בין האומות?</p>
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4. Based on Audio Class by Rabbi Yochanan Zweig, Pirkei Avot (Ethics of the Fathers) 1:1 – The Men of the Great Assembly saw G-d’s greatness “behind the scenes” of history.

Yirmiyahu and Daniel stopped praising G-d for being mighty and awesome because in their circumstances they could not perceive these aspects of G-d. They had lived during a period of prophecy, open miracles, and a more direct relationship with G-d. When G-d went into hiding, as it were, after the destruction of the Holy Temple and the dispersal of the Jewish people into exile, G-d’s might and awesomeness were no longer apparent to them.

Nevertheless, the Men of the Great Assembly were able to reinstate these praises by reinterpreting how they applied to this new reality. Although they could no longer perceive open revelations of G-d, they were able to see G-d's hand in Jewish history, restraining Himself from punishing the wicked and protecting the Jewish people in exile.

Part D. וזוכר חסדי אבות ומביא גואל לבני בניהם – Remembering the Kindness of the Forefathers and Bringing a Redeemer to their Children's Children.

Why do we ask that G-d recall the chesed of the forefathers?

1. Rabbi Avraham Edelstein, Commentary on the Weekday Siddur, Ner Le'Elef Books, pp. 125-6 – The chesed of the Avot stands in our merit and serves as an impetus to emulate them.

G-d remembers the chesed which our Avot did, and this stands as a merit for us – i.e. *zechut Avot*. The trouble with this is that, on the surface, Shmuel in the Gemara in Shabbat says that *zechut Avot* no longer helps us in this way. However, Tosafot say that Shmuel's limitation applies only to evil people – they can no longer draw on *zechut Avot* to protect them – but other people can. (In addition, Rabbeinu Tam says that the covenant of the Avot is still with us.) Therefore, we invoke G-d's memory of the chesed of the Avot in our merit. This is partly so that G-d's investment in the Avot will not go to waste, so to speak; their descendants inherit the *berachah* earned by their spiritual investment.

Meshech Chochma has a different approach to this issue. According to him, when we invoke the chesed of the Avot it is to remind ourselves, not as an appeal to G-d, that it is this power of spiritual chesed which was what made the Avot into what they became to begin with. We draw on this *zechut* whenever we express our passion for Torah and mitzvot or succeed in transmitting a love of Torah and mitzvot to the next generation. But *zechut Avot* is no longer so powerful that it can act as our guarantor for ourselves and our children. Whenever we see a weakening we should understand that *zechut Avot* is no longer working for us and it is now up to us to become Avot anew, i.e. to imitate what the Avot did by becoming spiritual and material givers ourselves. This will reactivate the *zechut* of chesed which the forefathers initiated. Now if the *mekatreg* (Prosecutor) will want to claim that we are merely drawing on our natural genetic endowment of chesed from the Avot and deserve no reward for this, G-d will respond by remembering the original chesed of the Avot.

What does it mean that G-d “remembers” the kindness of the forefathers? And what is their connection to our redeemer, the Mashiach?

2. Rabbi Avigdor Nebenzahl, Thoughts for Rosh HaShanah, pp. 204-5 – In calling upon G-d to remember certain events, we are asking Him to activate the merit of those events in His dealings with us.

When referring to “remembrance” as applied to G-d, we must realize that we are merely borrowing a term from our own experience to aid our understanding. Thus, when we mention reminding G-d of the covenant that He made with our forefathers, we realize that He always “remembers” it. Instead, we are referring to G-d's presently activating this idea that is in His constant memory and putting it into action by applying the efforts of our ancestors' meritorious acts in today's world...

While G-d perpetually remembers everything, nevertheless He chooses to act on the basis of specific memories that will then influence the way He will run the world. Hence, we invoke the memory of the Avot as a prayer that G-d should bring the Mashiach in light of their good deeds.

3. Rabbi Zev Leff, Shemoneh Esrei, pp. 40-41 – G-d considers the acts of our forefathers worthy enough to justify treating us kindly and ultimately sending us the Mashiach.

The act of remembering, when referring to G-d, does not just imply that He exercises His power to recollect, but rather it connotes that which G-d considers substantial and worthy of existing and enduring. This is evident from the angels' response to G-d's inquiry of whether man should be created: "*Mah enosh ki tizkerenu* – What is man that You should *remember* him?" (Tehillim 8:5). Obviously, "remember" here does not mean to recollect, since man had not been created yet, but rather, "What is man that You should even consider him?"

We are made aware of G-d's presence by observing G-d's reward in this world for the kindnesses of our forefathers. This reward is manifested by the miraculous Divine Providence that has accompanied the Jewish people throughout history. The ultimate manifestation of that reward for the kindnesses of our forefathers will be realized when, as the next phrase in the berachah relates, G-d will "bring a redeemer to their children's children."

In part, it is the remembrance of our forefathers' deeds and kindnesses that forms the zechut Avot, the merit that we enjoy until today. As Chazal comment, "If our forefathers had used up all the reward coming to them, what would have been left to sustain us?" (Talmud Yerushalmi, Sanhedrin 10: 1). The good that one does in his lifetime creates a spiritual entity that continues to exist even after one's death. That spiritual reality affects one's descendants and leaves its mark on the world.

The qualitative and quantitative dimensions of our forefathers' merit are so intense that they will last until the final redemption and help ensure that the redemption will ultimately happen.

Why do we mention only the kindness of the Avot and not their other qualities of strength and truth?

4. Rabbi Avraham Chaim Feuer, Shemoneh Esrei (Artscroll), pg. 61 – The kindness of the forefathers was their concern for what G-d wants.

Abraham excelled in kindness, Isaac in fear, and Jacob in truth, yet here we mention *the lovingkindness of [all] the Patriarchs*, because this trait is the root of all Divine service.

The most accurate definition of *chesed* is "selflessness" - to live for others, to live for a cause outside and greater than oneself. An egocentric person always serves himself, even when he appears to serve others. The Avot taught the world how to breach the constraints of selfishness. Because the Avot were selfless in their service of G-d, they earned the title "chassid," selfless one. Mesillat Yesharim (chapter 18) describes this level: Unlike the servant who fulfills his obligation by rote, the *chassid* has a vibrant love for G-d, like that of a son for his beloved father. The *chassid* studies the ways of G-d constantly in order to discover new opportunities to please his Creator.

We devote much effort to please important people. We strive in myriad ways to ingratiate ourselves to our clients, customers, congregants, patients, employers, and teachers. But no one is more important to our success than G-d. How much time do we spend trying to please Him?

First and foremost the Avot were “G-d-pleasers.” They shared good fortune with others because they knew it pleased G-d. Therefore, G-d never forgot them and graciously remembers us, their descendants, to this very day.

Note that the blessing does not state that G-d *will bring* a redeemer, i.e. the Mashiach, but rather that He *brings* the redeemer, in the present tense. Why?

The reason this phrase is written in the present tense is to emphasize that redemption is not an event that will occur abruptly in the future; rather, it is a steady, ongoing process that is happening right now, for G-d is constantly protecting us from our enemies by virtue of His relationship with our forefathers.

5. Rabbi Yitzchak Maltzan, Siddur HaGra: Siach Yitzchak – G-d’s remembering the Avot keeps the Jewish people going throughout the generations.

The notion that G-d remembers the kindness of the forefathers is relevant at each and every moment in time, as it is written (in the Haggadah of Pesach), “this (covenant with G-d) has preserved our ancestors and us, for not only one nation has risen against us (to destroy us); rather, in every generation (they rise against us to destroy us), yet G-d saves us from their hand.”

And He brings a redeemer to their children’s children – this is also an ongoing process because every event that occurs to us paves the way for the redemption and true, eternal happiness.

וענין זכירת חסדי אבות הוא בכל עת וזמן, וכמו שכתוב והיא שעמדה לאבותינו ולנו שלא אחד בלבד עמד עלינו אלא שבכל דור ודור וכו' והקב"ה מצילנו מידם.

ומביא גואל לבני בניהם, הוא גם כן בכל זמן, כי הענינים המתגלגלים עלינו, הם הכנה לגאולה ולאור הנצחי האמיתי.

Rabbi Zev Leff sees a contradiction in the words of this berachah: Will G-d bring the redeemer *l'ma'an Shemo*, for His own sake, or *b'ahava*, out of love? The first implies that G-d will act in a certain way without regard to His relationship with us while the other implies that He will act precisely because of it?

Rabbi Leff’s answer is based upon the following idea:

6. Yeshayahu (Isaiah) 60:22 and Talmud Bavli, Sanhedrin 98a – Mashiach will come at the appointed time, but if we are worthy he may come sooner.

The smallest shall become a thousand and the least a mighty nation; I am the L-rd, in its time I will hasten it.

Rabbi Alexandri said: Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi contrasted [the words in the verse]. It is written [Yeshayahu 60:22], “In its time,” and it is written, “I will hasten it”! If they are worthy,

הקטן יהיה לאלף והצעיר לגוי עצום אני יקוק בעתה אחישנה:

אמר רבי אלכסנדר: רבי יהושע בן לוי רמי, כתיב [ישעיהו ס"ב] בעתה, וכתיב, אחישנה! זכו - אחישנה, לא זכו - בעתה.

then “I will hasten it”; if they are not worthy, it will come “in its time.”	
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The Redemption can come either *b'itah*, in its pre-designated time, at the final deadline, or *achishenah*, hastened before that time if we so merit it. Hence, the Redemption will come “*l'ma'an Shemo*.” Whether we merit it or not, it will come for the sake of G-d's Name because the world must reach its culmination. Or it may come “*b'ahavah*,” with love, and it will be brought sooner in response to our merit.

Part E. מלך עוזר ומושיע ומגן – G-d Helps, Saves, and Protects

What is the difference between each of these accolades of G-d: Helper, Savior, Protector?

1. Rabbi Yitzchak Maltzan, Siddur HaGra: Siach Yitzchak – G-d helps us with what we try to do but acts on His own to save and protect us.

A <i>helper</i> is conjoined with the effort of the one being helped; a <i>savior</i> acts without help from anyone else; a <i>shield</i> serves to protect even before the misfortune starts.	עוזר הוא בצורך השתתפות הנעזר, ומושיע הוא בלא השתתפות כח אחר ומגן הוא קודם בוא הצרה.
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2. Rabbi Zev Leff, Shemoneh Esrei, pp. 47-48 – G-d is involved in our lives on many levels.

Ozer, “helper,” applies to those areas where man initiates an effort toward a goal, and it serves as the prerequisite for G-d's Divine assistance - such as the Divine aid one receives in earning a living, finding a mate, or conquering one's evil inclination. All begin with man's *bishtadlus*, his own initial effort that opens the way for G-d's assistance, in fulfillment of “G-d will bless you in all that you will do” (Devarim 15:18).

The second designation, *moshia*, “saves,” refers to those situations where man is helpless to even initiate an effort. Circumstances prevent him from being able to act in any significant manner to resolve his problem or achieve his goal. Here G-d takes an active part, saving and delivering the one who remains a passive recipient of that salvation and deliverance.

Finally, the third designation, *magen*: G-d protects and shields one in a situation where one actively functions in a manner detrimental to his well-being, counterproductive to achieving his goal. An example of this is someone forced to put himself under threat of being killed for Kiddush Hashem (lit. to sanctify G-d's Name, i.e. simply for being a Jew). G-d will then function as a shield that protects him from his own potentially physically harmful actions.

An illustration of this concept is seen in the story of Avraham. G-d was the “*Magen Avraham*,” the Shield of Avraham, when Avraham permitted himself to be thrown by Nimrod into the fiery furnace rather than renounce his belief in G-d. We learn that when G-d shielded Avraham from death, the angels resounded with this berachah: “Blessed are You, G-d, the Shield of Avraham.”

Part F. מגן אברהם – The Shield of Avraham

Our first encounter with Avraham is when G-d appears to him and tells him לך לך, “go for yourself” to the land that I will show you, and there shall you be blessed. Our Sages understood these words

to mean that the end of the first blessing of Shemoneh Esrei should end only with his name and not those of Yitzchak and Yaakov as well. Avraham's spirituality was so encompassing that it reflected the spiritual reality of the whole nation. When we say "Magen Avraham" we therefore mean the whole Jewish nation.

1. Rabbi Avraham Chaim Feuer, Shemoneh Esrei, pg. 65 – G-d protects the core of the Jewish soul.

One of the primary teachings of the Chassidic masters is that although evil influences may corrupt a Jew and alienate him from his roots, a Jew is never completely lost. In the deepest recesses of the soul there survives a tiny spark of Jewishness, pure and untainted. From such a spark a brilliant flame of faith can be rekindled. This indestructible *pinteleh Yid* [lit. tiny dot of the Jew] was implanted into the genetic design of our people by Abraham, and G-d promised to protect and preserve it forever when He assured Abraham: "*I am your shield.*"

Key Themes of אבות – Forefathers.

- We begin the Shemoneh Esrei with a prayer recalling our forefathers. The fact that this berachah is the first to be recited highlights the central role of tradition in the act of prayer. We do not stand alone but on the shoulders of those who came before us.
- Recognizing that G-d is the G-d of our ancestors also helps us relate to Him more personally.
- Invoking the Avot is a way of praising G-d because we are focusing on the kindness G-d showed them by revealing to them the path of truth.
- We mention that G-d is the G-d individually of each of the Avot because each of them forged a new path towards G-d. Avraham's path was that of kindness, Yitzchak's that of inner strength or restraint, and Yaakov's that of truth – combining chesed and gevurah, kindness and strength, in the proper balance.
- Understanding and identifying with the spiritual accomplishments of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov are essential in order to utilize the Amidah to communicate one's needs to G-d and to actualize one's personal mission.
- Although in earlier times of our history, G-d's strength and awesomeness were obvious, these days we have to look for these qualities "behind the scenes." We seek out the instances throughout history when G-d withholds punishing sinners and keeps the Jewish people alive in exile.
- In this berachah we call upon G-d to activate His memory of the Avot in order to advance the world toward the ultimate redemption in the times of Mashiach.
- We praise G-d for helping us and for protecting us, both physically and spiritually.

Berachah 2. גבורות (Gevurot) – G-d's Might

אתה גבור לעולם אדני. מתיה מתים אתה רב להושיע:
בקיץ - מוריד הטל: בחורף - משיב הרוח ומוריד הגשם:
מכלל חיים בקסד. מתיה מתים ברחמים רבים. סומך נופלים. ורופא חולים ומתיר אסורים. ומקים אמונתו
לישני עפר. מי כמוך בעל גבורות ומי דומה לך. מלך ממת ומתיה ומצמיח ישועה:
וגאמן אתה להחיות מתים: בריך אתה יקוק מתיה המתים:

You are eternally mighty, my L-rd, You are the One Who resurrects the dead; abundantly able to save.

[In the winter say:] He makes the wind blow and He makes the rain descend.

[In the summer say:] He makes the dew descend.

He sustains the living with kindness. He resurrects the dead with abundant mercy, supports the fallen, heals the sick, releases the confined, and maintains His faith to those asleep in the dust. Who is like You, O Master of mighty deeds, and who is comparable to You, O King Who causes death and restores life and makes salvation sprout!

And You are faithful to resurrect the dead. Blessed are You, G-d, Who resurrects the dead.

We continue our praise of G-d in the second berachah of Shemoneh Esrei. Here we focus not on G-d's relationship with our ancestors or the Jewish people, but on His power over nature and the good that He does for us with that power. In this second berachah, we affirm that our connection to G-d transcends our finite physical life in *Olam Haze'eh* (This World), and is eternal through *Olam Haba* (The World to Come).

Part A. Resurrection of the Dead

Although many people are familiar with Resurrection of the Dead from other religions, it may be surprising to discover that this concept is central to Jewish thought. But *Techiyat Hameitim* (the Resurrection of the Dead) in the future World to Come is indeed one of the most fundamental principles of Judaism.

The World to Come is the time and place in which we will experience closeness to G-d commensurate with the actions and choices we made during our lifetime. The first stage of this reward is in the entirely spiritual World of the Souls. But that is not the highest level of existence. Ultimately, the body will be resurrected, and the soul will be reunited with the body to experience a new dimension of reality and attachment to G-d.

1. Ramchal (Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto), Derech Hashem (The Way of G-d) 1:3:9, translated by Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan, Feldheim Publishers, pp. 51-53 – Since Adam's transgression, man is in a non-perfect state. To re-attain the perfection for which man was destined, his body and soul each undergo a purification process.

[After Adam's mistake] justice decreed that neither man nor the world will ever be able to rise to perfection while still in their current fallen state. Because they remain in this spoiled, non-ideal condition, and evil in the meantime has increased, both man and the world must go through a stage of destruction before either can

ואולם מלבד כל זה גזרה מידת דינו יתברך, שלא יוכלו, לא האדם ולא העולם מעתה, הגיע אל השלמות - עודם בצורה שנתקלקלה, דהיינו הצורה שיש להם עכשיו שבה נתרבה הרע. אלא יצטרך להם בהכרח עבור מעבר ההפסד, דהיינו המיתה לאדם, וההפסד לכל שאר ההווים שנתקלקלו עמו.

<p>arrive at perfection.</p> <p>Man must therefore die, and everything else that was corrupted with him also must perish. The soul cannot purify the body until the body dies and deteriorates and a new structure is composed, that the soul can enter and purify...It was therefore decreed that man should die and then be brought back to life. This is the concept known as the Resurrection of the Dead...</p> <p>The true time and place of reward will therefore be after the Resurrection in this renewed world. Man will then enjoy his reward with both body and soul. The body will be purified by the soul, and will therefore also be in a proper state to enjoy that good.</p>	<p>ולא תוכל הנשמה לזכך הגוף, אלא אחר שתצא ממנו תחילה, וימות הגוף ויפסד, ואז יחזור ויבנה בניין חדש ותכנס בו הנשמה ותזככה... ועל כן נגזר על האדם שימות ויחזור ויחיה, והוא עניין תחיית המתים...</p> <p>והנה לפי שורש זה, זמן הגמול האמיתי, דהיינו זמן קיבול השכר... ומקומו הוא אחר התחייה בעולם שיתחדש, והאדם ייהנה בו בגופו ובנשמתו, בהיות גופו מזוכך על ידי נשמתו, ומוכן על ידה להיות נהנה בטוב ההוא.</p>
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Death is the process by which the soul and body are temporarily separated and returned to their sources. The soul returns to the World of the Souls and the body returns to the ground. This is so that a new, purified structure can be built at the time of the Resurrection, when the soul will reinhabit the body, free from the deficiencies caused by Adam's transgression.

The Resurrection of the Dead is also the time when everything in existence reaches its *tikun* (perfected state), fulfilling its ultimate purpose in G-d's plan. At this time, the whole physical creation will join the spiritual world in a new unity.

2. Rabbi Ehud Rakovski, Da'at Tefillah: Kedushah – The entire world will be renewed along with man in the service of G-d.

<p>The Resurrection of the Dead will not be for man alone, but rather for every force in the entire universe that came into actualization at any time since Creation – they will all be renewed and perfected at the time of the Resurrection of the Dead. The whole idea of man being resurrected is that he is a microcosm, but the whole world will likewise experience the same thing. This is what Rabbi Shlomo Elyashiv wrote in HaDe'ah (Vol. II, Ch. 2), "The central principle of the Resurrection of the Dead, as it has been revealed to us by the Arizal, is continuously taking place even in this world as we find more and more of the physical world being harnessed for the good of man. It is all to be used in the service of man...and when he uses the world in the service of G-d...both he and it rise up higher and higher, each and every</p>	<p>ולא יהיה תחיית המתים להאדם לבד אלא כל פרטי הכחות דכל הבריאה כולה והנהגתה אשר בכל ימי עולם, הנה כולם יתחדשו ויתוקנו בעת תחיית המתים. וכל ענין תחיית המתים אשר להאדם שהוא עולם קטן. הנה יתנהג כמו כן לכל העולם כולו. רב שלמה אלישיב [כתב], [ב]הדעה ח"ב דרוש ב: "כי הרי עיקר הענין דתחיית המתים נודע הוא מדברי האריז"ל שהוא נוהג באמת תמיד בכל רגע... והוא מה שאנו רואים גם בעולם הזה שיוצא תמיד פעולות חדשות בכל חלקי הדצח"מ [דומם, צומח, חי מדבר] שבה ומתקנים לצורך האדם. וכל פעולתם הרי הוא לצורך האדם... וכשמשתמש האדם בהנאתם המגיע לו מהם לעשות רצון קונו... עולה כל חלקי נפשו עם כל כחות... הללו למעלה למעלה, כל כח וכח לשרשו ומקורו...</p>
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force according to its intrinsic nature...”	
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What is the actual connection between *Gevurah* (G-d’s strength) and *Techiyat Hameitim*?

3. Rabbi Noson Weisz, Prayer Works, pp. 237-238 – How we achieve Olam Haba through *Gevurah* (G-d’s power).

What is the actual connection between *Gevurah* (G-d’s strength) and *Techiyat Hameitim*? Specifically, why is G-d’s power, rather than any of His other attributes, the means by which we achieve eternal life? First, we must define what we mean by being alive. In *Olam Hazei*, a living person, metaphorically speaking, exists on life-support. Human beings cannot remain alive unless the Almighty keeps them connected to the life-sustaining physical universe, and even in this state, our life expectancy is severely limited. We begin the countdown to death as soon as we are born. When the Almighty “pulls the plug” and disconnects an individual from the physical world, the person dies. We have no independent power to remain alive.

For *Techiyat Hameitim* to occur, however, we must acquire the power to exist without the help of *Olam Hazei*, for although *Olam Haba* will have a physical component, the vast life-support system – the entire natural world and food chain – will not be required to sustain it.

Nevertheless, that is the world in which we are destined to spend eternity. The very purpose of our free will is to earn the right to live eternally without having to do so as dependents. Thus *Olam Haba* is not some G-d-given life-support system that is more efficient than the one G-d provided for us in *Olam Hazei*. Rather, it is a place suited to those who have developed their own power to live eternally by means of the activities they engaged in during their relatively brief earthly sojourn. Obviously, such power must come from the Source of all power – the Almighty. He must transfer to us the power of independent existence during the free will stage of our life spans in *Olam Hazei*, just as parents raise and educate their children to live independently from their birth family as adults. Because the transfer of power – *gevurah* – is an essential component of *Techiyat Hameitim*, the second *berachah* of the *Amidah* must call upon G-d’s *Gevurah*. Because the power we require must be sufficient to maintain us in a state of eternal life, we require an infusion of G-d’s eternal power. Hence “*Atah gibbor l’olam.*”

Why is death necessary to gain entry to *Olam Haba*? To answer this question, we need to first understand the consequence of transgression and its impact on the boundary between the physical and spiritual worlds.

4. Rabbi Noson Weisz, Prayer Works, pp. 244-245 – Man’s behavior and the interface between the physical and spiritual worlds.

Before Adam committed the first sin, the physical and spiritual worlds were separated by a porous, open border. Adam’s sin, however, closed the border, and man thereafter could cross from this world into the next only by passing through death. On the day Adam sinned, G-d told him that he would be condemned to die.

Through Adam’s sin, the wide-open passage between the spiritual and physical worlds, which existed ever so briefly, was shut tight. When physicality could elevate itself to spirituality and spirituality could descend into the physical domain, there was no need to die. Sin closed the gate. Indeed, closing the gate between the physical and the spiritual is the definition of sin:

"It is not the hand of Hashem that is too limited to help you. It is not His hearing that is impaired. Rather it is your sins that erected the barrier between you and your G-d, it is your iniquities that hide His face from you, so that it appears that He cannot hear you" (Isaiah, 59:1-2).

This is the nature of all sin, whether it involves harming another human being or violating a law of the Torah which seems to have no earthly impact. With our eyes trained to see only the physical, we are unable to perceive the spiritual repercussions of violating Torah prohibitions. An emotionally healthy person can see how affronts against others harm both the perpetrator and the victim in terms of their physical and emotional well-being, yet the impact of such acts in the invisible realms of the spiritual are either brushed aside or believed to be non-existent by all but the most G-d fearing individuals.

More elusive yet is our grasp of the impact of transgressions of the more ritualistic commandments that are strictly a matter between man and G-d. Modern, secular minds cannot perceive that eating shellfish would have any consequences beyond a full stomach; a Shabbos afternoon drive to the mall would seem to cost nothing more than the gas and expenditures for shopping. If that were the case, however, the Torah would not prohibit these acts. Anything G-d prohibits is by definition harmful to one's soul. We go through life much like the smokers in the days before the harm of smoking was known. We destroy our spiritual health, but because we do not feel the impact right away, we do not connect the cause with the result.

The harm created by sin comes in the form of an impenetrable barrier it erects between the physical and spiritual worlds. Nothing physical can get through to the spiritual realm, and therefore, the body must be shed through death.

How can we open the barrier to Olam Haba?

5. Rabbi Noson Weisz, Prayer Works, pg. 246 – Opening the barrier to Olam Haba.

If man is to ultimately enjoy an existence that is a perfect synthesis of soul and highly refined physicality in Olam Haba, the junction must be reopened. This means that man's physical component must be repaired and rebuilt into a structure pure enough to harmonize perfectly with the soul. This purification is the work achieved through death. While our *neshamot* are dwelling temporarily in Gan Eden, our bodies return to the dust from which they were fashioned and from which a purified version of them will be rebuilt in preparation for Techiyat Hameitim (Nefesh Hachaim, 1). That is the only way we can engage in life in Olam Haba. All of this – the process of death and Techiyat Hameitim – takes place at the junction of heaven and earth.

If the Resurrection will occur in the future, why is the berachah of Techiyat Hameitim expressed in the present tense?

6. Rabbi Noson Weisz, Prayer Works, pp. 247-248 – Preparing now for Techiyat Hameitim through challenges.

Rabbi Yitzchok Hutner asks a question that brings the concepts discussed above into sharp relief. He notes that the second berachah is in the present tense: We are stating that the Almighty brings us back to life, not that He will do so. If we understand that Techiyat Hameitim does not take place in our world, but rather, opens the era of Olam Haba, then why do we describe the Almighty as the *Mechayei Meitim* [the One Who resurrects the dead] in the present tense? Why is the second

berachah in the Amidah at all, when the Amidah is supposed to relate to fulfilling our present needs?

Rabbi Hutner explains that, whereas *Techiyat Hameitim* is a power rather than a state, the power must be acquired now, while we are still alive. That is achieved by developing the soul's strength to overcome the tribulations that G-d's *Hashgacha Pratit* sends our way.

The Talmud (Rosh Hashanah 16b) states that on Rosh Hashanah, the Book of Life and the Book of Death are open before the Almighty, and He decides into which book He will inscribe our names. The early Talmudic commentators explain that the Book of Death referred to here, does not necessarily mean actual death; every tribulation we face in this world is included in this definition of death (Rashba et al, Rosh Hashanah 16b). G-d places these mini-deaths in our lives with a precise calculation of exactly how much challenge our souls require in order to develop the ability to overcome sorrow and trouble. By acquiring the power to overcome the mini-deaths we encounter in our lifetimes, we acquire the skill and the power to overcome the trauma of death itself.

Because the Almighty enables us to develop this ability now, in the physical world, He is described in the present tense as the *Mechayei Meitim*. The actual Resurrection may take place far in the future, but that is only a change in our state of being. The power to overcome death must be acquired in the here and now. The difficulties we are sent by *Hashgacha Pratit* are the teachers we require to train us to overcome our deaths, and live forever.

(See this idea further below in Part E below.)

What do the words “maintain His faith” come to teach us about *Techiyat Hameitim*?

7. Rabbi Avraham Chaim Feuer, Shemoneh Esrei (Artscroll), pg. 76 – G-d keeps track of every molecule.

Rabbi Avigdor Miller observes that G-d will *maintain His faith* to resurrect even those whose graves are lost and whose bodies have disintegrated. Some bodies have drowned in the ocean, etc. Nevertheless, G-d is faithful; He keeps account of every molecule of dust and ashes, and will collect them all, despite the passage of thousands of years.

For more on the Resurrection of the Dead see the Morasha Class entitled “World to Come, Part III.”

Part B. רב להושיע – Abundantly Able to Save

G-d can do whatever He wants, so of course He is “*rav lehoשיע* – abundantly able to save”! What do these words come to illustrate?

In this context the word *rav* is difficult to translate. According to the Yalkut Katan, it should be taken literally to mean “many,” for the Amidah is drawing a contrast between the extent of G-d’s salvations and those of flesh of blood; G-d’s involvement in our lives is plentiful.

1. Talelei Orot citing Yalkut Katan, Prayer Anthology, Vol. II, pp. 626-7 – G-d has many ways to help us.

<p>If someone wants to save his fellow from danger, his possibilities are limited, but the Holy One is “many” to save. A human rescuer can find only one or two means to accomplish his goal, but the options open to the Holy One are unlimited.</p> <p>Another nuance involves persistence. If a human rescuer succeeds in saving someone once, what happens if the one he saved gets into the same predicament again? The one who saved him the first time is often unwilling to help him again and again, but the Holy One is “many” to save. He rescues us repeatedly, persistently, no matter how many times we are endangered. Whether it is physical or spiritual danger, the Holy One is always there to save us no matter how many times we fall.</p> <p>Also, if many people are in danger, a human rescuer is able to come to the aid of only one or two of them at a time, either because that is all he has the power to do or because he does not want to spread himself so thin. And even if he does try to help many, his effort to help one will come at the expense of helping another. He will not be able to help everyone as much as necessary. By contrast, the Holy One is “many to save,” without any limitation He sustains the whole world at all times and satisfies everyone’s needs with precise providence, with each part of His help performed to perfection.</p>	<p>לא כמידת הקב"ה מידת בשר ודם. מידת בשר ודם אף כשרוצה להושיע את זולתו, הרי האפשרויות העומדות בפניו הן מועטות, אופן אחד או שניים, אבל השי"ת "רב להושיע" - בדרכים ובאפשרויות אין סוף ובלי שום גבול ומידה.</p> <p>ועוד, מדת בשר ודם שאף אם נחלץ פעם להושיע את זולתו ממצוקתו, מכל מקום אם ישוב אותו אדם למצבו הקשה וחוזר חלילה, כל אחד יישמט מלעזרו שוב ושוב. אבל מדת השי"ת - "רב להושיע", פעם אחר פעם שב ומושיט עזרה וישועה רוחנית וגשמית לאדם, אף אם שבע יפול.</p> <p>ועוד, בשר ודם יכול להתפנות ולסייע למשאלות של אדם אחד או שניים בלבד, הן מצד האפשרויות המצומצמות והמוגבלות העומדות לרשותו, והן בגלל שאין לבו יכול להתחלק ולעשות בשלימות מוחלטת הרבה ענינים להרבה אנשים. ואם בכל זאת יתעסק בכמה וכמה ענינים ויעזור לכמה בני אדם, על כרחך תיפגם איכות המעשה האחד על חשבון השני ולא תוכל עזרתו להיות מושלמת לכולם. אבל השי"ת "רב להושיע" - בלי גבול ומידה זן את העולם כולו בכל עת ובכל שעה, ומשביע לכל חי רצון בהשגחה פרטית ומדוקדקת, וכל פרט ופרט בעזרה נעשה באופן מושלם.</p>
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Part C. גבורות גשמים – The Powers of Rain

At this point in the tefillah, during the winter months of the year, we mention G-d’s power to bring rain. We may well wonder why; what does rain have to do with the Resurrection of the Dead, the main theme of this blessing?

The Sages tell us that rain is as great an act of providence as Resurrection of the Dead, and therefore it is mentioned in this blessing.

1. Talmud Bavli, Berachot 33a – Rain is akin to resurrection.

<p>The powers of rain are mentioned in the blessing of Resurrection – for what reason? Rabbi Yosef</p>	<p>מזכירין גבורות גשמים בתחיית המתים: גמרא מאי טעמא אמר רב יוסף מתוך ששקולה כתחיית המתים לפיכך</p>
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<p>said, “Since [rain] is equivalent to the Resurrection of the Dead they set it in the blessing of Resurrection.”</p>	<p>קבעוה בתחיית המתים.</p>
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How is rain related to resurrecting the dead? What do the two have in common?

2. Rabbi Menachem Meiri, Commentary to Berachot 33a – The rain “resurrects” the seeds in the ground.

<p>Mentioning [rain] in the blessing of Resurrection was instituted, because the rains revive the seeds and plants which have “died” and dried out, for something dried out is called “dead” in the language of the Talmud.</p>	<p>הותקנה להזכיר בברכת תחיית המתים ר”ל אתה גבור מפני שהגשמים מחיים את הזרעים ואת הצמחים שכבר מתו ויבשו והיבש נקרא בלשון תלמוד מת.</p>
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3. Rabbi Noson Weisz, Prayer Works, pp. 250-251 – Without rain, there would be no life.

In a seemingly improbable change of topic, the *Amidah* inserts into the blessing of Tachiyat Hameitim a phrase referring to the Almighty’s control of rainfall. We recite this insertion starting on the last day of Succot and ending on the first day of Pesach. This encompasses the entire rainy season in the Land of Israel.

The reason this phrase is inserted at this point in the *Amidah* is set forth in the Talmud (Taanit 7a). Rabbi Avahu said: “A day on which it rains is greater than the day on which the dead will return to life. Tachiyat Hameitim is only for the righteous, whereas the rain is for the wicked as well as the righteous.” This interpretation is in dispute with the interpretation of Rabbi Yosef, who said: “They inserted ‘*mashiv haruach*’ into the blessing about Tachiyat Hameitim because providing rain and reviving the dead have equal weight.”

The Talmud goes further in its assessment of the value of G-d’s gift of rain, comparing it to the giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai, and even with the act of Creation. Why does this natural phenomenon stir such awe among the Talmud’s Sages? How could the power to send rain to the earth be compared with the power to revive the dead?

Without rain there can be no life; nothing can grow without water. It is such a key ingredient of creation that the word meaning rain in Hebrew – *geshem* – shares its root with the word that describes all physicality – *gashmiyut*.

4. Ibid., pp. 251-252 – The key to survival is reaching out to G-d in prayer.

Rain releases the life energy hidden in the earth. As vital as rain is to survival, however, the Almighty did not implant any natural mechanism in creation by which we can access rain in a totally predictable way. All man’s acquired agricultural knowledge and effort, therefore, cannot guarantee the successful production of life-sustaining food. His most basic need is dependent on one strategy alone: prayer.

The Torah (*Genesis* 2:5) teaches that this was G-d’s plan from the beginning of time: “Now all the trees of the field were not yet on the earth and all the herbs of the field had not yet sprouted, for Hashem had not yet sent rain upon the earth and there was no man to work the soil.” Rashi explains that G-d had not sent rain because there was no man to work the soil; there was no one to pray for

it. It was only when Adam arrived on the scene, recognized the need for rain, and prayed for it, that the trees and vegetation began to spring forth.

In His design of creation, the Almighty linked the power of life to rain, and rain to prayer. In doing so, He informed us that the power of life – even physical life – is not in our hands. Our most basic key to survival is something we must acquire from the Almighty through prayer. We must pray in order to have the power to live. Thus, rainfall is the animation of that which has no innate life force. As rain infuses a seemingly dead world with life force, it becomes an everyday, this-world mirror of *Techiyat Hameitim*, just as the sages of the Talmud declare.

Part D. מכלכל חיים בחסד – G-d Provides Sustenance with Kindness

How do we see G-d's kindness in the way that He provides sustenance?

G-d not only made a world that provides food for its inhabitants, He even made the food in a way that is enjoyable for us. While He could have made everything that is nutritious taste like dirt or tree bark, in His kindness He sustains us with delicious food. Let's take oranges, for example:

Food is something that we need to maintain our energy levels and health. If it's only function were nutrition and nothing more, then all the foods that we eat should taste like soggy cardboard. Yet they don't. There are so many different types of foods, each with a unique flavor, texture, and aroma. Why create them that way? Why not make it all taste like oatmeal? Again, for one reason: so that man should enjoy. So that eating, which we have to do, shouldn't be a chore, but a pleasure. Taste is something that G-d added solely for our benefit - for our delight.

I once heard R' Avigdor Miller describe an orange. When you peel an orange, there are wedges inside. If you look closely, each one of these wedges is surrounded by a thin membrane. When you pull back the membrane and look inside, you will see many tiny sacs. Inside each of those sacs is the juice of the orange.

*Why did G-d create an orange in that manner, with thousands of little sacs? The reason is simple: to further enhance our enjoyment. Did you ever see one of those children's candies with a liquid center? They're advertised with the slogan, "Bite in for a burst of flavor." When you bite into an orange, you also get a burst of flavor. The juice of the orange is contained within those many small sacs, so when you bite into it, there is a release of juice in the form of a burst, and that adds to the enjoyment of eating the orange. G-d created those sacs so that there would be another dimension of enjoyment. The sensation of eating an orange would be different without them. Oranges would still taste delicious, but this is an additional aspect that G-d wanted us to benefit from, so He designed an orange in this way, (Rabbi Ben Tzion Shafier, *The Jewish World of Wonders*, May 2011, pg. 16)*

G-d does not just sustain the world; He does so *with kindness*.

Part E. Resurrection-like Occurrences – G-d Supports the Fallen, Heals the Sick, and Releases the Confined

What is the connection between the other things mentioned in this blessing – such as healing and releasing the bound – and the central theme of Resurrection?

Although Resurrection of the Dead is a concept we have never experienced, we do come across resurrection-like events in our daily lives. One example we already mentioned is that of seeds growing in the ground. The blessing of *Gevurot* goes on to praise G-d for other such resurrection-like occurrences: supporting the fallen, healing the sick, and releasing the confined.

1. Rabbi Shimon Schwab, On Prayer, pg. 428 – G-d gives us a taste of the World to Come when He lets us experience resurrection-like occurrences in our lives.

He supports the falling. There are people who experience a constant series of “falling down” in their lives. They have one failure or disappointment after another. They see the bottom falling out from under them. And then, suddenly, G-d lifts them up, and they experience a turnaround in their lives. This is an example of a “resurrection-like” event.

He heals the sick. Consider the case of someone who falls seriously ill, with the doctors abandoning all hope for his recovery, and he, himself, believing he will never get well. But then, he experiences a sudden, inexplicable recovery, and lives for many years. This is an example of an event of resurrection in this world, as a result of the *chesed* of G-d.

He releases the confined. If one is in prison – or in a concentration camp – without hope of release, and he suddenly receives a pardon, or the American army captures the concentration camp and frees all the prisoners, he has experienced a resurrection-like event.

In our daily cycle of sleeping and awakening we experience something of the miracle of *Techiyat Hameitim*. While we are asleep, our consciousness leaves us and, upon our awakening, it returns. In fact, *Chazal* call sleep “one sixtieth of death” (see *Berachot* 57b). If sleep is one sixtieth of death, then awakening is one sixtieth of resurrection. The very fact that we awaken in the morning is an act of resurrection.

These are examples of “Resurrection of the Dead” in which G-d metes out His acts of kindness in this world which, while they are not limitless, are nevertheless a taste of the World to Come.

2. Rabbi Noson Weisz, Prayer Works, pp. 256-257 – Praising G-d for empowering us to overcome obstacles to earn Olam Haba.

In this phrase, we are praising G-d for helping us in our times of need. Paradoxically, our prayers declare that everything that happens in our lives – including failure, sickness, and poverty – occur because of G-d’s *Hashgachah Pratit*. Thus, this phrase seems to offer strange praise; we are lauding the very One Who imposed the difficulties on us for saving us from the troubles He imposed. It would seem far more praiseworthy for G-d to simply refrain from creating the need for this rescue. In this paradox lies the crux of the blessing of *Gevurot*. The three misfortunes mentioned here encapsulate the three categories of all human suffering – failure, disease, and the limitations imposed by life’s circumstances. One who could overcome these three obstacles would have overcome all human limitations; he would also be able to overcome death.

In short, this phrase informs us that our troubles are designed to teach us how to overcome death and to acquire the power and determination to implement what we have learned. If we are to live forever, we cannot simply float downstream on the *chesed* energy of *Olam Hazei*. We must develop some inner power. We must build the *gevurah* within ourselves that is needed to channel the *chesed* and propel us across the death barrier into *Techiyat Hameitim* and *Olam Haba*.

Resurrection is one of the three “keys” that G-d Himself holds on to and is responsible for their use.

3. Talmud Bavli, Taanit 2a-b – G-d holds the keys to the things which mankind will never control.

<p>Rabbi Yochanan said: G-d holds three keys that He does not give agency over to anyone else. These are the key to rain, the key to life (childbirth), and the key to Resurrection of the Dead...In the West (Israel), they said: also the key to livelihood, as the verse states, “You open Your hand (and satisfy the desire of every living thing)” (Tehillim 145:16). And why didn’t Rabbi Yochanan count it? He would explain to you that livelihood was already included in rain.</p>	<p>אמר רבי יוחנן: שלשה מפתחות בידו של הקדוש ברוך הוא שלא נמסרו ביד שליח, ואלו הן: מפתח של גשמים, מפתח של חיה, ומפתח של תחיית המתים. ... במערבא אמרי: אף מפתח של פרנסה, דכתיב (תהלים קמה) פותח את ידך וגו'. ורבי יוחנן מאי טעמא לא קא חשיב להא? אמר לך: גשמים היינו פרנסה.</p>
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In this berachah we mention rain, resurrection, and livelihood, but what happened to the gift of life, i.e. childbirth? Why is there no mention of this “key” in the blessing of Gevurot?

4. Rabbi Yehoshua ben Alexander HaCohen Falk, Perishah, Commentary to Tur, Orach Chaim 114 – Childbirth is included in “releases the bound.”

<p>Even though the text of the blessing does not mention childbirth, there are those who say that it was intended in the words “releases the bound” which is like childbirth in that the baby and the mother were “bound.” It is for this reason that in the blessing said at a Brit Milah we say “Thank G-d for He is good” for it is taught (Talmud Bavli, Berachot 54b) that there are four situations for which a person is obligated to thank G-d, one of them being upon getting released from jail. Since the mother and child are in a situation similar to someone released from the bonds of jail, this verse was instituted to be said at a <i>brit</i>.</p>	<p>אף על גב דלא הוזכר בנוסח ברכה זו חיה יש אומרים הטעם שיכוין למ”ש מתיר אסורים שהוא כמו חיה שהולד והאם היו אסורים ומטעם זה תקנו לומר בברכת המילה הודו ליי’ כי טוב וגו’ משום דתנן (ברכות נד ע”ב) ארבעה צריכין להודות ואחד מהן מי שיצא מבית האסורין והולד והחיה כיון שהן כמו שיצאו מבית האסורים תקנו לומר זה הפסוק.</p>
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Parenthetically, another resurrection-like occurrence, not mentioned in this berachah is meeting up with a long-lost friend.

5. Shulchan Aruch 225:1 – We bless G-d for resurrection when we meet up with a long-lost friend.

<p>Someone who sees a friend after an interval of more than thirty days says the blessing of <i>Shebecheyanu</i> [praising G-d for allowing him to reach that moment]. After an interval of more than twelve months, he blesses “He Who Resurrects the dead,” but that is only for a very</p>	<p>הרואה את חבירו לאחר שלשים יום אומר: שהחיינו, ואחר י”ב חדש מברך: מחיה המתים, והוא שחביב עליו הרבה ושמה בראייתו.</p>
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close friend who he is happy to see.	
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Part F. מלך ממית ומחיה – A King that Causes Death and Makes Life

Isn't this phrase the wrong way around? G-d first makes life and only then does He cause death!

The answer is that what we call life – this life – is not all there is. G-d causes death, but only so that He may again give life – eternal life.

1. Pirkei Avot 4:22 – Everyone will die, but will be resurrected.

The born will die, and the dead will live.	הילודים למות והמתים להחיות.
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At the time of Resurrection, human dignity will be preserved.

2. Rabbi Avraham Chaim Feuer, Shemoneh Esrei (Artschroll), pg. 74 – What will people wear upon resurrection?

The Talmud (Sanhedrin 90b) relates that Queen Cleopatra said to Rabbi Meir, “I fully believe that the dead are destined to be resurrected, but I would like to know if they will emerge from the earth naked or clothed?” Rabbi Meir replied, “The dead will arise fully clad and this can be logically proved by observing nature. A naked kernel of wheat is planted in the ground, yet it emerges fully clothed as a stalk of wheat, covered with husks and wrappings. Certainly man who is clothed in shrouds at his burial will emerge from the earth covered with garments.” This is G-d's mercy to the dead. He preserves their dignity, and they return to life properly attired (Etz Yosef).

Key Themes of גבורות – G-d's Might.

- Resurrection of the Dead is a fundamental of Jewish belief. Judaism maintains that the soul is cleansed after death and will in the future reinhabit the body in a perfected state. This process is part and parcel of the ultimate *tikun olam*, perfection of the world.
- We mention the power of rain in this berachah, because it is similar to resurrection in that it breeds life.
- We also mention other resurrection-like acts of kindness such as supporting the fallen, healing the sick, and releasing the confined.
- In this berachah we praise G-d's powers of providence. Specifically, we mention those powers not controlled by mankind, namely rain, livelihood, and resurrection. A fourth power, that of giving life, is also alluded to in the berachah.
- G-d causes death, but only so that He may grant life once again – but at that time, it will be in the perfected resurrected state.

Berachah 3. קְדוּשַׁת הַשֵּׁם (Kedushat HaShem) – Holiness of G-d's Name

אַתָּה קָדוֹשׁ וְשִׁמְךָ קָדוֹשׁ וְקָדוֹשִׁים בְּכָל יוֹם יִהְיֶה לְךָ סֶלָה:
בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָהּ. הָאֵל הַקָּדוֹשׁ:

*You are holy and Your Name is holy, and holy ones praise You every day, forever.
Blessed are You, L-rd, the Holy G-d.*

Our task in this world is to be holy and thereby sanctify G-d. That we say this blessing after the blessing of Gevurot, which deals with Resurrection of the Dead, is significant. With these words, we are saying that even in this world we strive to imitate that time when everybody will naturally sanctify G-d and His Name.

Part A. Holiness

What does it mean for us to be holy and how do we make ourselves that way?

1. Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto, Mesilat Yesharim, Ch. 26 – Holiness means clinging to G-d.

Holiness is defined as the state in which a person clings so closely to G-d that in any deed he might perform he does not depart or move from the Blessed One, to the point that the physical objects he uses become elevated because of his having used them, rather than him falling from his lofty spiritual state because of having occupied himself with them. This, however, only holds true if his mind and intelligence cling so closely to the greatness, majesty and holiness of the Blessed One that it is as if he is united with the celestial angels while yet in this world.	כללו של דבר ענין הקדושה הוא שיהיה האדם דבק כל כך באלהיו, עד שבשום מעשה אשר יעשה לא יפרד ולא יזוז ממנו יתברך, עד שיותר יתעלו הדברים הגשמיים אשר ישמשו לאחד מתשמישיו במה שהוא משתמש בהם, ממה שירד הוא מדביקותו ומעלתו בהשתמשו מדברים גשמיים. ואמנם זה בהיות שכלו ודעתו קבועים תמיד בגדולתו יתברך, ורוממותו וקדושתו, עד שימצא כאילו הוא מתחבר למלאכים העליונים ממש עודהו בעולם הזה.
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2. Rabbi Shimon Schwab, On Prayer, pg. 433 – Controlling our physical desires is a way to be holy.

The Torah tells us, “You shall be holy” (Vayikra/Leviticus 19:2). The reason given by the Torah is, “because I, the L-rd your G-d, am holy” (ibid.). The difficulty here is obvious. It is analogous to a demand by a king that “You shall be a king because I am a king;” or by a philosopher that, “You shall be a philosopher because I am one.” How can G-d ask us to be holy because He is holy? We are human beings; G-d created us with an evil inclination and placed us in a material world with all its attractions and enticements. But G-d is telling us here “Be holy,” which means separate yourselves from your animal urges, “because I am holy,” I have placed within you a spark of My own holiness, the image of G-d which is the ability of the human being to overpower and separate himself from his evil inclination.

Just as G-d is *Kadosh*, above and not bound by His nature, He has imbued the human being with a similar power of *Kedushah*, that of being able to transcend his own urges and inclinations, and separate himself from them...

And we thank G-d for giving us this ability of transcending our animal urges, and thereby assuming an aspect of Kedushah, by saying, “Blessed are You, G-d, the holy G-d.”

3. Rabbi Yissachar Frand, Parshat Kedoshim 5765, from www.torah.org – Being holy does not mean being a monk.

Rabbi Moshe Sofer points out that one might draw the erroneous conclusion that the only way to achieve sanctity is to lock oneself on the top of a mountain in a monastery. One could think that we should ideally have nothing to do with people; we should not get married and have nothing to do with the opposite gender at all. The Torah therefore makes clear that the “holiness” of a monk is not desirable. This section was specifically delivered in public [to the entire nation]. Everyone was present - the men, the women, and the children.

One must be a *Kadosh* [a holy person], but one must be a Kadosh in the context of the congregation and the community. One must get married and one must raise children. One must play with his kids and spend time with his family and be a part of the community. The Torah wants the holiness of complete human beings.

The Kotzker Rebbe used to stress “MEN of holiness you shall be to Me” [Shemot 22:30]. “G-d is not looking for more angels.” The Torah was not given to angels [Berachot 25b]. It was given to human beings who have wants and desires and are social animals. In that context we are commanded to develop holiness.

Therefore, specifically *Kedoshim Tibeyu*, of all mitzvot, was relayed in a mass public gathering to emphasize that despite our obligation to achieve holiness through a certain degree of abstinence it must be in the context of the community, together with one’s wife, one’s children, and one’s neighbors.

4. Rabbi Zev Leff, Shemoneh Esrei, pp. 69-70 – Holiness means being in the world but not of the world.

Kadosh means “separate and removed.” Hence, one who is holy is removed and separated from the unnecessary indulgences of the physical materialistic world. At the same time, kadosh means “designated.” He designates all physical and materialistic occupations totally for the service of G-d.

My teacher, Rabbi Mordechai Gifter, points out that we are exhorted to be kedoshim, holy ones, just as G-d is holy. G-d is indivisibly involved in every aspect of the physical world – for nothing could exist without a connection to Him – yet He is totally removed from it in the sense that the physical world cannot affect Him. So, too, real holiness means directing and utilizing the physical world, while at the same time being separate and aloof and thus unaffected and impervious to being drawn down to materialism.

At the time of reciting Kedushah we should tap into our desire to cling to G-d and overcome the limitations of our physical nature.

Part B. G-d's Name

What does it mean that we will sanctify G-d's Name? Why do we talk about His Name rather than about G-d Himself?

1. Rabbi Shimon Schwab, On Prayer, pg. 432 – G-d's "Name" represents the attributes of Himself that He reveals to us.

While we have no conception of G-d, nevertheless, He has revealed to us His "Names," His attributes, that aspect of His Being that He wishes us to know. Rabbi Samson R. Hirsch explains that the word *shem*, or name, is related to *sham*, meaning "there." In the realm of the mind, by naming and defining something, one puts it in its "proper place." When G-d said [in the Ten Commandments], "I am the L-rd, your G-d," He meant: Regarding Me, you know only that I am *your G-d*, and what I have revealed to you about Me. Regarding the essence of My Being, the human mind can have no conception, I am without a beginning and without an end. However, what you can know about Me are My "Names," that which I revealed to you through the Torah.

This is what is meant by "the entire Torah consists of the Names of G-d" (see Zohar HaKadosh 3:13b and Ramban, Introduction to Bereishit). Every letter, every word in the Torah is another *shem*, another revelation of G-d.

These are the things that He wants us to know about Him. Therefore, in the blessing upon the Torah, we say: May we be knowledgeable of Your Name. The teachings of the Torah are Your "Names." G-d has revealed to us, through the Torah and the Prophets, what His will in the world is, and we pray that we be given the proper understanding of what that will is.

Part C. קדושים – The Holy Ones

Who are the "holy ones" that praise G-d every day and forever?

One opinion is that it refers to the angels. Another is that it refers to the souls of those righteous people who have passed away and after their death are called "kedoshim," holy ones.

1. Talmud Bavli, Chulin 7b – The righteous are even greater in death than in life.

Rabbi Chama bar Chanina said: The righteous are even greater in their death than during their lifetime.	אמר ר' חמא בר חנינא: גדולים צדיקים במיתתן יותר מבחייהן.
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In what way are the righteous better dead than alive?

As long as a person is alive, the evil inclination can always seduce even a Tzadik to sin. The righteous are greater in their death than in their lives, for only then will they definitely remain righteous forever.

2. Rabbeinu Bachaye, Commentary to Devarim 34:5 – The souls of the righteous are guaranteed to praise G-d forever.

"And Moshe, the servant of G-d, died there." Moshe was not called G-d's servant until he	וימת שם משה עבד ה' - לא נקרא עבד עד שמת ... ומפורש אמרו, גדולים צדיקים במיתתן יותר מבחייהם.
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<p>died...It is stated explicitly that the righteous are even greater in their death than during their lifetime. Similarly, people aren't called <i>kadosh</i> until they die. This is what the verse means when it states, "For the holy ones who are in the earth," (Tehillim 16) which our Sages explained to be a reference to the forefathers (Menachot 53a). Similarly, the Midrash states that G-d does not call anyone holy until after they are buried in the ground. The reason for all this is that the evil inclination vexes a person during his lifetime in this world, and G-d cannot trust [that the person will not change] until he actually dies. Even the forefathers were not called holy until they died.</p> <p>From here we understand the wording in our prayers, "and holy ones praise You every day, forever." It is the soul of the righteous person that does the praising, as the verse states, "every soul shall praise G-d" (Tehillim 150:6).</p>	<p>וכן מצינו שהאדם אינו נקרא קדוש עד שמת, וזהו שכתוב (תהלים טז) על האבות אשר בארץ המה, ורז"ל דרשוהו (מנחות נג) על האבות שמתו, שכן אמרו במדרש תהלים אין הקב"ה קורא לצדיקים קדושים עד שינתנו בארץ, לפי שיצר הרע מצר לאדם בעוה"ז ואין הקב"ה מאמין בו עד שמת, ואפילו אבות העולם לא נקראו קדושים עד שניתנו בארץ, עד כאן.</p> <p>ומזה תקנו בתפלה, וקדושים בכל יום יהללך סלה, ונשמת הצדיקים היא המהללת, כענין (שם קנ) כל הנשמה תהלל יה.</p>
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Part D. קדושה – Kedushah

During the *chaṣan's* (cantor's) repetition of the Shemoneh Esrei in the morning and afternoon, we recite Kedushah, verses describing and praising G-d's holiness. Through this recitation we sanctify G-d.

1. Vayikra 22:32 – It is a mitzvah to sanctify the Name of G-d.

Do not desecrate My holy Name. I must be sanctified among the Israelites. I am G-d [and] I am making you holy.	ולא תחללו את שם קדשי ונקדשתי בתוך בני ישראל אני יקוק מקדשכם:
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How do we fulfill this mitzvah? Well, one way is simply by reciting Kedushah:

2. Mishnah Berurah 125:4 – Reciting Kedushah is a fulfillment of the mitzvah to sanctify G-d's Name.

A person must fervently have intent during Kedushah to sanctify the Name of G-d. In doing so G-d will make holiness rest upon him from Above. One should also have intent to fulfill the verse, "I must be sanctified among the Israelites." The Arizal was very particular about doing this.	וצריך לכוין ביותר בקדושה לקדש את השם ית' ובזכות זה ישרה עליו הש"י קדושה מלמעלה ויכוין לקיים הפסוק ונקדשתי בתוך בני ישראל והאר"י ז"ל היה מזהיר מאוד על זה.
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The weekday Kedushah begins with “*nekadeish*” or “*nakdishach*,” – let us sanctify – a call to prepare. This signifies the fact that Kedushah needs preparation and requires one to focus his attention on this sanctification. Since Kedushah, holiness, means to designate and separate, one must properly prepare and designate his intentions before saying Kedushah. Furthermore, without the proper preparation and designation, Kedushah is impossible. Making something holy refers to the proper usage of all mundane things in subjugation to G-d. If one does not plan and prepare to systematically control all of his functions, he will inevitably not be able to successfully control his actions with purely holy intentions.

There are various forms of Kedushah recited during different prayer services, such as the weekday Amidah, Shabbat morning and Mussaf Amidahs, and the Yom Tov Mussaf Amidah. While we have these various forms, nevertheless two verses are common to them all:

*Holy, holy, holy is the L-rd of Hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory.
Blessed is the glory of the L-rd from His place.*

1. Yeshayahu (Isaiah) 6:1-3 – The prophet has a vision of the angels praising G-d.

<p>In the year of the death of King Uzziah, I saw the L-rd sitting on a high and exalted throne, and His lower extremity filled the Temple. Seraphim stood above for Him, six wings, six wings to each one; with two he would cover his face, and with two he would cover his feet, and with two he would fly. And each one called to the other and said, “Holy, holy, holy is the L-rd of Hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory.”</p>	<p>בשנת מות המלך עזיהו ואראה את אדני ישב על כסא רם ונשא ושוליו מלאים את ההיכל: שרפים עמדים ממעל לו שש כנפים שש כנפים לאחד בשתים יכסה פניו ובשתים יכסה רגליו ובשתים יעופף: וקרא זה אל זה ואמר קדוש קדוש קדוש יקוק צבאות מלא כל הארץ כבודו:</p>
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<p>“Holy” expresses the notion that G-d is high above any attribute of created beings, although many of these are applied to Him metaphorically. For this reason Isaiah heard an endless: “Holy, holy, holy,” which meant that G-d is too high, too exalted, too holy, and too pure for any impurity of the people in whose midst His glory dwells to touch Him. For the same reason Isaiah saw G-d “sitting on a high and exalted throne.”</p>	<p>וקדוש כנוי שהוא נקדש ומרומם משתאות לו מדה ממדות הברואים, ואם יקרא בהם הוא דרך העברה. ועל כן שמע ישעיהו קדוש קדוש קדוש עד אין תכלית, והטעם שהוא נקדש ומרומם משתשיגהו מאומה מטומאות העם אשר ישכון כבודו ביניהם, ועל כן ראה אותו על כסא רם ונשא.</p>
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3. Rabbi Meir Leibush (Malbim), Commentary to Yeshayahu 6:3 – G-d is holy in three distinct dimensions: spiritual, physical, and temporal.

Holy, Holy, Holy: According to the most basic understanding, this means that G-d is the King of kings. That is, He is holier than any holy being, meaning there is no holiness like His. He is (a) holy in heaven, for He is free of any form, (b) holy in this world, for He is free of any substance, (c) and holy forever and ever, for He is free of any non-existence.	קדוש קדוש קדוש. לפי פשוטו הוא כענין מלך מלכי המלכים, ר"ל השם קדוש יותר ממי שהוא קדוש על כל הקדושים, ור"ל שאין קדוש כקדושתו... ר"ל קדוש בשמים שנבדל מן הצורה, קדוש בארץ שנבדל מן החומר, קדוש לעלמי עלמיה שנעלה מן ההעדר
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The second verse, common to every form of Kedushah, is from Yechezkel (Ezekiel):

4. Yechezkel 3:12 – The prophet hears the praises of the angels.

And a wind lifted me up, and I heard behind me the sound of a great uproar: “Blessed is the glory of the L-rd from His place.”	ותשאני רוח ואשמע אחרי קול רעש גדול ברוך כבוד יקוק ממקומו:
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5. Rabbi Avraham Edelstein, Commentary on the Weekday Siddur, Ner Le'Elef Books, pg. 123 – How can G-d's glory be “everywhere” yet have a specific “place”?

There is a contradiction here. We say that His glory is everywhere. But then we go onto say that the glory of G-d is blessed from His (or its) place, so apparently G-d's glory has a particular place.	
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The answer to this is as follows: Our understanding of G-d's relationship to the world is limited by our human perception.

6. Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan, Handbook of Jewish Thought, Vol. I, pp. 15-16 – G-d both fills the world and is beyond it.

Our understanding of G-d's relationship to the world is twofold, namely, that He is both immanent and transcendental. Thus, He both fills and encompasses all creation. This duality, however, is only due to our imperfect understanding of G-d, since He Himself is the most absolute Unity.	
This twofold concept is expressed in the song of the angels. They sing, “Holy, holy, holy is G-d of Hosts, the whole world is filled with His glory” (Isaiah 6:3). This indicates that G-d is immanent, filling all creation. However, they also sing, “Blessed is G-d's Glory from His place” (Ezekiel 3:12). Here they are speaking of G-d in His transcendental sense, where even the highest angels cannot comprehend His “place.”	

7. Rabbi Chaim Volozhiner, Nefesh HaChaim 3:4 [with commentary of Rabbi Reuven Leuchter, Meshivat Nafesh] – From G-d's perspective there is nothing but Him in all of existence, but from our perspective the world exists independently, and G-d is beyond this world.

It says in many places in the Zohar that G-d “fills all worlds” and “surrounds all worlds.” This means that from G-d's perspective, He fills all worlds. [The meaning of “fills” here is not the	כי מבואר בכמה מקומות בזהר שאדון יחיד אין סוף ברוך הוא ממלא כל עלמין וסובב כל עלמין והיינו שמצדו יתברך נקרא בבחינת הממלא כל עלמין [ההבנה של “ממלא” כאן אינה כענין מילוי הנשמה את הגוף שהוא
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<p>same as how the soul “fills” the body because G-d both fills and occupies all of existence at once to such an extent that from His perspective the world does not even exist].</p> <p>Yet from our Torah-oriented vantage point, we see G-d as surrounding all worlds. The meaning of the concept of “G-d filling all worlds” is concealed from us. [That is, as far as we perceive it, the world does actually exist, while G-d is above and beyond all of existence.]</p> <p>The truth is that from G-d’s perspective, even after creating the world, He fills all the worlds and all existence; literally, “There is nothing else beside Him” (Devarim 4:35). We express this thought before our Shacharit (morning) prayer: “It was You before the world was created; it is You since the world was created.” This means that even after the worlds were created, G-d is eternal and unchanging, unaffected by time or place. He is the same now as before Creation when all was filled by His Infinite Oneness, filling also the space where the worlds are now.</p>	<p>מילוי פנימיותו של הכלי כי הקב"ה ממלא וחודר את כל המציאות כולה בבת אחת עד שניתן לומר שמבחינתו המציאות אינה קיימת].</p> <p>ומצדנו כפי אשר נצטוינו בתורה הקדושה בענין הנהגותינו בתורה ומצוות וכפי השגתנו בחוש נקרא יתברך שמו בבחינת סובב כל עלמין שבחינת ממלא כל עלמין הוא כבוד אלהים הסתר דבר מצדנו. [כלומר לפי השגתנו העולם הוא מציאות גמורה והוא ית' נמצא מעל ומעבר לכל העולמות כולם].</p> <p>והענין כי ודאי האמת שמצדו יתברך גם עתה אחר שברא וחדש העולמות ברצונו הוא ממלא כל העולמות והמקומות והבריות כולם בשיווי גמור ואחדות פשוט “ואין עוד מלבדו” כמשמעו ממש. וכמו שתקנו לנו קדמונינו ז"ל לומר קודם התפלה “אתה הוא עד שלא נברא העולם אתה הוא משנברא העולם” רוצה לומר אף שכבר נבראו העולמות ברצונו הפשוט יתברך עם כל זה אין שום שינוי והתחדשות חס ושלום ולא שום חציצה מחמתם בעצמות אחדותו הפשוט והוא הוא גם עתה כקודם הבריאה שהיה הכל מלא עצמות אין סוף ברוך הוא...</p>
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8. Rabbi Zev Leff, Shemoneh Esrei, pp. 76-77 – While G-d is everywhere, He wants us to relate to Him in human terms.

G-d’s glory fills the entire universe, as the Zohar remarks, “There is no place that is empty of G-d.” This idea implies that G-d gives everything the power to exist and therefore His will fills all of existence. Yet immediately we say, “*Baruch kevod Hashem mimkomo* – May G-d’s glory be blessed from His place,” which seems to relegate G-d’s presence to a specific place.

This seeming contradiction is elucidated by the Shiurei Daat, which says that these two perceptions are “*ratzah vashov*” - they run consecutively back and forth in one’s mind. On the one hand, we must realize that in the ultimate truth G-d is the only true existence, and that He fills all of time and space and nothing beyond His existence really exists. Yet we cannot function with this conception because it leaves no place for us in our world. In fact, the Michtav MeEliyahu relates that if one were to contemplate this absolute truth in the most intense manner and come to a perfect realization of its implications, his soul would automatically bond with G-d and he would cease to exist in this temporal world.

Developing this idea further, Nefesh HaChaim explains that although from G-d’s perspective His existence pervades all of creation, we cannot function with that perception. Such an idea could lead us to relate to all physical things as manifestations of the Divine, and thus prevent us from differentiating between pure material things that enhance holiness, and filthy, disgusting material things that suppress holiness. We must therefore acknowledge that from G-d’s perspective He is absent from nowhere. At the same time, He wants us to function as if we feel and experience His

presence in specific places. This accounts for the many sayings attributed to Chazal relating G-d's presence to the Beit HaMikdash [Temple], the Beit Midrash [study hall], and the Beit Knesset [synagogue]. This all comes from our ability to relate to G-d's holiness and to be sensitive to it in places conducive to that sanctity.

There are actually three times we say Kedushah in Shacharit. Why?

9. Rabbi Avraham Edelstein, Commentary on the Weekday Siddur, Ner Le'Elef Books, pp. 131-132 – The three Kedushas during the morning prayers.

There are three Kedushas during the morning davening. The first is in *Birkat Yotzer Or*, the first of the blessings before Shema, and is said by the *malachim* (angels). The second is the Kedushah of the Shemoneh Esrei, and the third is what is known as *Kedushah DeSidra*, said in *Uva Letziyon* after the communal repetition of the Shemoneh Esrei. (Maharal counts three but includes the Kedushah of Musaf and excludes *Kedushah DeSidra*.) On Shabbos and Yom Tov, we add the Kedushah of Mussaf. Each has its own purpose, as we will explain, and therefore the language is different for each. However, there are two lines common to all the Kedushas – Holy, Holy, Holy... and Blessed is the glory of the L-rd from His place.

The first Kedushah relates what the angels say. This blessing in general comes to show our recognition of G-d's presence in all parts of the creation. We might err in thinking that although G-d provides general Providence over the world there are forces of nature that, once created by G-d, have independent roles. Therefore, we point out that all of these are but messengers, merely enacting G-d's will. They, in turn, accept G-d's Kingship as much as we do, and are but tools for reflecting His harmony in the universe. They "grant permission to one another to sanctify the One Who formed them, with tranquility, with clear articulation, and with sweetness," declaring, as man does: Holy, Holy, Holy is the G-d of legions; His glory fills the whole world, etc.

In the second Kedushah, we model the angels with our own Kedushah. "Israel possesses no Kedushah of her own as distinguished from the Kedushah of the angels" [Rabbi Munk]. We model our own aspirations of Kedushah on the angels and therefore repeat their Kedushah. Not only in our words, but also in our body movements we try to imitate the angels. We stand with our feet together, rising on the tips of our feet as though striving to unite the lower host of G-d with the Upper Host, to break the bonds of earthly restraint – like the angels – with winged alacrity. However, since our declaration of Kedushah is freely chosen, it is ultimately higher than that of the angels and is therefore said at a more holy part of the davening, in the Shemoneh Esrei.

But then we move on: After facing G-d directly in the Shemoneh Esrei, we must now prepare ourselves to bring all that holiness into the world through the *Kedushah DeSidra*. In *Kedushah DeSidra* we refer to the type of holiness which G-d only produces for the sake of the Jewish people. It is this Kedushah which gets brought into the world, man's unique ability to put Kedushah into the material world and elevate it, something the angels cannot do. We say this Kedushah in Aramaic so that the angels will not understand and be jealous of us.

The three Kedushas reflect the three times the prophet Yeshayahu said the word Kadosh. In the *Kedushah DeSidra*, Targum Yonatan is cited saying that G-d is three times Kadosh – down here on earth, up in the Heavens, and for eternity over time. In addition, in each Kedushah we also say the word Kadosh three times, lifting our heels each time to show that our attachment to G-d's holiness

leads to our separating a little from the material world and soaring upwards.

Key Themes of קדושת השם – Sanctity of G-d's Name.

- Holiness means clinging to G-d in thought and deed. We become holy through using this world as a means to relate to G-d. That effort demands that we use our spiritual faculties to subdue our basic animalistic nature. We can do that because G-d has placed a spark of the Divine in each of us.
- We talk about sanctifying “G-d's Name” because we can only know about G-d what He chooses to reveal to us by the way in which He runs the world. His essence, however, is unknowable to us.
- The “holy ones” that praise G-d are the angels and the souls of the righteous in Heaven.
- Reciting Kedushah is a fulfillment of the mitzvah to sanctify the Name of G-d; this itself requires proper preparation on our part.
- The verses of Kedushah express the Jewish concept of G-d as being both immanent – what the world is made up of – and transcendent – above and beyond what we perceive in the world. The true essence of G-d's holiness is beyond our comprehension, yet G-d still wants us to be able to relate to Him through our own terms of understanding.

Chapter Two

The Middle Berachot of Request

Introduction to the Middle Berachot:

The blessings that make up the Shemoneh Esrei cover every type of prayer and respond to every human need. I once asked a class of students who did not pray regularly in the traditional manner if they were ever moved to utter a quiet prayer, a hope, a wish in the privacy of their hearts, and if so, to volunteer to tell the class what it was. After a little thought and some initial embarrassment, they began to raise their hands one by one. Everyone had, at one time or another, uttered some prayer, some wish. The content of the personal prayers varied from student to student – some were intensely personal, others reflected more general hopes dealing with the world at large. We then fit each personal prayer into a broader category and discovered that they all fell within the framework of one of the blessings of the Shemoneh Esrei. (Hayim Donin, To Pray as a Jew, pg. 73)

The middle blessings, in which we lay out our requests before G-d, were written in a way that allows for personal expression within a structure. In a broad sense, these blessings are divided between prayers for personal and communal needs.

1. Avudraham, Shemoneh Esrei – The middle berachot (blessings) form a pattern of two pairs of six plus an all-encompassing concluding berachah.

It has been written that the thirteen middle berachot form a pattern of two pairs of six, with the thirteenth, <i>Shome'a tefillah</i> , being an all-encompassing conclusion. The first six deal with personal matters...and the six personal needs are followed by communal needs... After that comes <i>Shome'a tefillah</i> , that all the prayers should be accepted by G-d.	וכתב עוד כי י"ג ברכות אמצעיות הם ששה כנגד ששה ושומע תפלה כנגד כולם. ששה ראשונות באדם עצמו... ואחר ששאל ששה בצרכי היחיד חוזר לשאול בצרכי הרבים... ואח"כ שומע תפלה על כל הברכות.
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2. Based on Avudraham

Personal:	Communal:
1) Intellect and Insight	7) Ingathering of Exiles
2) Repentance	8) Restoration of Justice
3) Forgiveness	9) Against Heretics and Traitors
4) Redemption	10) The Righteous
5) Health and Healing	11) Rebuilding Jerusalem
6) Prosperity	12) David's Dynasty
13) Acceptance of Prayer	

The distinction between personal and communal needs can also be subdivided between spiritual and physical needs as follows:

3. Based on Elie Munk, The World of Prayer, Vol. I, pg. 172 – Division of spiritual and physical needs.

Personal:	
Spiritual needs:	Knowledge, Repentance, Forgiveness
Physical needs:	End to Strife, Healing, Rain (livelihood) and Gathering the Jews from Exile
Communal:	
Spiritual needs:	Restoration of Judges, Destruction of Heresy, Reward for the Faithful
Physical Needs:	Jerusalem, Mashiach (Messiah), Acceptance of Prayers

We find that even though these thirteen blessings are requests, they still each end with a berachah praising G-d. Sefat Emet says that this structure is unique because ordinarily a request would not end in a berachah. However, the roads and gates of Heaven that facilitate these requests for forgiveness, healing, *teshuvah* (repentance), livelihood, etc. are opened anew by G-d every day. We make the berachah in recognition of this fact – Blessed be You, O G-d, Who opens the door every day to insight, teshuvah, etc. Our blessing G-d in this way serves to access these berachot.

4. Rabbi Yehuda Aryeh Leib Alter, Sefat Emet, Parshat Vayeishev (5643/1883) – Because G-d continually renews the possibilities for attaining what we request in the Shemoneh Esrei, we thank Him after each request that we make.

All of these things that we pray for are unique in that each day G-d renews the avenues toward attaining them. These are not trivial matters that we request but rather the very foundations of the world. Each day G-d reopens these avenues and gates: the gate of forgiveness, of healing, of repentance, of livelihood, etc. And that is why a berachah is placed at the end of each request, for if it were merely a request, why should there be a berachah? Rather, we must have faith that every day G-d gives these blessings to the world and that the Jewish people (through our prayers) have the power to awaken the means of their attainment.	וכל אלה המה דרכים מיוחדים שמתחדשין בכל יום. כי אין הדברים במקרה רק הם עמודים שהכל עומד עליהם. והקב"ה פותח בכל יום אלה הדרכים והשערים שער סליחה ורפואה ותשובה ופרנסה כו'. לכן נתקן ברכה בסוף כל בקשה ואם הי' בקשה בלבד מה ענין הברכה רק שיש להאמין כי בכל יום נותן הקב"ה אלה הברכות לעולם רק בכח בני לעורר אלה הדרכים.
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One should add his own personal prayer into the Shemoneh Esrei as it pertains to the particular blessing being recited.

5. Talmud Bavli, Avodah Zarah 8a – Each prayer can be personalized by mentioning one's own needs.

Said Rav Yehuda the son of Shmuel bar Shilat in the name of Rav: Even though it was said that	אמר רב יהודה בריה דרב שמואל בר שילת משמיה דרב, אע"פ שאמרו: שואל אדם צרכיו בשומע תפלה, אבל אם
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one should pray for his private needs only at Shome'a Tefillah, nevertheless, if he is disposed to supplement any of the berachot [with personal supplications] relevant to the subject of each particular berachah, he may do so.	בא לומר בסוף כל ברכה וברכה מעין כל ברכה וברכה - אומר.
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See further Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 119 for the detailed application of this idea.

Berachah 4. בינה (*Binah*) – Insight

אַתָּה חוֹנֵן לְאָדָם דַּעַת. וּמְלַמֵּד לְאֶנוֹשׁ בִּינָה: תְּחַנּוּנוּ מֵאִתְּךָ דַּעַת בִּינָה וְהַשְׁכָּל. בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה חוֹנֵן הַדַּעַת.

You graciously endow man (adam) with wisdom, and teach insight to a frail mortal (enosh). Endow us graciously from Yourself with wisdom, insight, and discernment. Blessed are You, G-d, gracious Giver of wisdom.

The first thing we ask for is wisdom. Here we will explore what exactly we are asking for, why we ask it from G-d, and why it is the first request posed in the Shemoneh Esrei.

Part A. The First Request

The first of our requests is for insight and understanding so that we will understand right from wrong and make the correct decisions in our lives. Unlike the format of all the other requests in this section of the Shemoneh Esrei, this one begins with praise of G-d for bestowing understanding upon us.

1. Siddur Otzar HaTefillot, Iyun Tefillah – The first request segues from the opening praises by starting with a statement of praise.

Because the theme of the first three berachot of Shemoneh Esrei is praise, [the Sages] began the second section of Shemoneh Esrei with words of praise in order to create a smooth transition from the theme of praise to the theme of requests (Maharashal).	לפי ששלש ראשונות כולן שבח לכן התחילו גם את האמצעיות בשבח, כדי להסמיך שבח לשבח ולעבור בהדרגה משבח לבקשה (מהרש"ל).
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Why is this blessing the first of our requests of G-d? Why is insight and understanding so important to us?

2. Rabbi Avraham Edelstein, Ner Le'Elef Booklet, Insights into the Weekday Siddur, pg. 137 – Wisdom is the essential attribute guiding mankind.

Wisdom is so important that it was fixed as the first of the requests, ahead of good health, wealth or long life. Wisdom is the main thing which ensures the overall spiritual, emotional and physical health and balance of a person.	
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3. Shulchan Aruch 115:1 – Intellect distinguishes us from the animals and is a prerequisite for all the prayers that are to follow.

The blessing of <i>Atah chonen</i> was placed first amongst the requests because mankind's superiority over the animals is his insight and intellect; without intellect, prayer is meaningless.	מפני שמותר האדם מן הבהמה היא הבינה והשכל, קבעו ברכת אתה חונן ראש לאמצעיות, שאם אין בינה אין תפלה.
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4. Talmud Bavli, Nedarim 41a – Without wisdom we have nothing.

Abaye said: We have it as tradition that no one is poor save he who lacks wisdom. In the West (Israel) there is a proverb: He who has this, has everything; he who lacks this, what has he? One	אמר אבאי, נקטינן: אין עני אלא בדעה. במערבא אמרי: דדא ביה כולא ביה, דלא דא ביה מה ביה? דא קני מה חסר? דא לא קני מה קני?
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who has acquired this, what does he lack? One who has not acquired this, what does he possess?	
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5. Pirkei Avot (Ethics of the Fathers) 2:5 – Without wisdom or knowledge it is impossible to live a fully moral and righteous life.

A boor cannot be sin-fearing; an ignoramus cannot be pious...	אין בור ירא חטא ולא עם הארץ חסיד.
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Wisdom is the blessing that keeps on giving. When we have wisdom, we will also know what to pray for, and so many other blessings will come in its wake. Similarly, we find that when G-d offered King Shlomo (Solomon) to be granted any request, he asked for wisdom (see II Divrei HaYamim/II Chronicles 1:7-12)

Part B. אתה חונן – G-d Gives Wisdom

Implicit in the wording of this blessing is that intelligence is not a given at birth but rather is a G-d-given gift that He has the power to either withhold or to bestow upon us. No one knew this better than the wisest man who ever lived, King Shlomo, author of the Book of Mishlei (Proverbs):

1. Mishlei 2:6 – G-d grants intelligence.

For the L-rd gives wisdom; from His mouth [come] knowledge and discernment.	כי יקוק יתן חכמה מפיו דעת ותבונה:
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2. Talmud Bavli, Niddah 70b – Prayer can help us become wise when study alone fails to produce results.

[The citizens of Alexandria asked Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chananya:] “What must a man do that he may become wise?” He replied: “Let him engage more in study and less in business.” They said, “Did not many do so, and it was of no avail to them?” – Rather, “Let them pray for mercy from the Source of wisdom, for it is said, ‘For the L-rd gives wisdom; from His mouth [come] knowledge and discernment’ ” (Mishlei/Proverbs 2:6).	[שאלו אנשי אלכסנדריא את רבי יהושע בן חנינא:] מה יעשה אדם ויחכם? אמר להן: ירבה בשיבה, וימעט בסחורה. אמרו: הרבה עשו כן ולא הועיל להם! אלא: יבקשו רחמים ממי שהחכמה שלו, שנאמר (משלי פרק ב, ו) כי יקוק יתן חכמה מפיו דעת ותבונה: .
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G-d not only gives us intelligence – He does so for free. The berachah alludes to this fact in its choice of words for “give”: *chonen*.

3. Rabbi Shimon Schwab, On Prayer, pg. 440 – G-d gives intelligence for free.

The word <i>chonen</i> comes from <i>chen</i> , which means a spiritual endowment. It is related to the word <i>chinam</i> , as in <i>matnat chinam</i> , a free gift. G-d gives knowledge to people even if they do not deserve it. A human being – as wicked as he may be – is, nevertheless, given intelligence by G-d.
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Part C. דעה בינה והשכל – Wisdom, Insight, and Discernment

What do these terms mean? What is the difference between each type of intelligence? Also, what is the difference between *adam* and *enosh*, that one should be granted wisdom and the other insight?

The commentaries offer many explanations of all these terms. Though they sometimes appear to conflict with one another, they do essentially agree upon the basic idea behind this blessing. Here is one explanation of the terms for wisdom and insight:

1. Shemot (Exodus) 31:1-3 with Commentary of Rashi – Definitions of Wisdom, Insight, and Discernment.

<p>G-d spoke to Moses, saying, “I have selected Betzalel son of Uri son of Chur, of the tribe of Judah, by name. I have filled him with a Divine spirit, with wisdom, insight and discernment, and with [the talent for] all types of craftsmanship.”</p> <p>With wisdom: [i.e.,] what a person hears from others and learns.</p> <p>With insight: With his intellect he understands other things based on what he learned.</p> <p>With discernment: Divine inspiration.</p>	<p>וידבר יקוק אל משה לאמר: ראה קראתי בשם בצלאל בן אורי בן חור למטה יהודה: ואמלא אתו רוח אלהים בחכמה ובתבונה ובדעת ובכל מלאכה:</p> <p>בחכמה - מה שאדם שומע מאחרים ולמד:</p> <p>ובתבונה - מבין דבר מלבו, מתוך דברים שלמד:</p> <p>ובדעת - רוח הקדש:</p>
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2. Rabbi Avraham Edelstein, Ner Le'Elef Booklet, Insights into the Weekday Siddur, pg. 137 – The interrelationship of Chochma, Binah and Daat.

<p>These three [terms – Chochma, Binah, and Daat –] although each separate, build on each other. They represent three levels of wisdom.</p> <p>Chochma represents abstract intellectual understanding.</p> <p>Binah is the emotional integration of the wisdom, where a person feels comfortable with that knowledge, can relate to it personally and therefore also understand where it is and where it is not relevant to his/her life.</p> <p>Daat is the translation of that wisdom into action. It represents a complete unity between the person and the knowledge; a total connection with that knowledge, and it is no longer just relevant information which one applies. It is now the person – he/she is totally united with that knowledge (Rashi, Shemot 31:3).</p>

According to this explanation, the berachah is arranged in descending order: first asking for the more ethereal daat and then the more mundane binah. Hence some commentaries say that adam (man), for whom we ask for daat, is a higher level than the more lowly enosh (mortal), for whom we plead for binah.

3. Rabbi Chaim Joseph David Azulai (Chida), Machzik Berachah – Adam is loftier than Enosh.

<p>In the berachah of' we must try to understand the use of different words seemingly for the same things: /teach, man/mortal, wisdom/insight, for it should have just said, "wisdom and insight" or "You teach insight."</p> <p>Perhaps the term <i>adam</i> is an honorable epithet for man, and <i>daat</i> means Divine inspiration, as Rashi explained in regard to Bezalel. <i>Enosh</i>, mortal, is a more mundane title. So this is why it says, "You graciously endow" Divine inspiration as a gift to the higher-level person, <i>adam</i>, "endow" being in the present tense. And He teaches insight to <i>enosh</i>, the lower-level person, in order that he should understand something.</p>	<p>בברכה אתה חונן לאדם דעת וכו' צריך להבין, כפל הענין במילים שונות חונן ומלמד, אדם אנוש, דעת בינה, והוה ליה למימר אתה חונן לאדם דעת ובינה או ומלמד בינה?</p> <p>ואפשר דאדם הוא הכינוי המובהק ודעת הוא רוח הקדש כמו שפירש רש"י גבי בצלאל, ואנוש הוא גרוע שבשמות, וזה שכתוב אתה חונן כדרך מתנה לאדם שהוא המובהק רוח הקודש וחונן בהוה, ומלמד לאנוש גרוע בינה שיבין איזה דבר.</p>
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However, we also find the exact opposite explanation in other commentaries, such as the following:

4. Rabbi Yosef Albo, Sefer HaIkarim I:16 – The requests for intelligence flow in ascending order of complexity.

<p>Basic intelligence is called ordinary <i>daat</i>. The berachah says, "You bestow intelligence (<i>daat</i>) upon man" because this level of intelligence is equal among all people without any prior learning, simply by virtue of G-d's grace. Then the berachah states, "and teaches insight to the <i>enosh</i> (mortal)," referring to the ideas that emerge from the initial information. This is called <i>binah</i>, insight. This is dependent upon study and relates to the <i>enosh</i> for not everyone uses insight. That is why the berachah concludes with "gracious Giver of <i>daat</i>," for it is the most general act of kindness done for the entire species rather than a select few. But the berachah also calls for more than <i>daat</i> and <i>binah</i>; it also calls for <i>haskel</i>, which refers to spiritual matters, as the verse says, "Understand and know Me" (Yirmiyahu/Jeremiah 9:23).</p>	<p>המושכלות הראשונות יקראו דעת סתם. ואמר אתה חונן לאדם דעת, כי הדעת הזה שוה בכל אדם מבלי שום למוד אלא על צד החנינה. ואמר ומלמד לאנוש בינה, על ידיעת הוצאת התולדה מן ההקדמות, שזה יקרא בינה. ותלה זה בלמוד טבעי, ויחס אותו לאנוש, כי אין כל אדם משתמש בבינה אלא האנוש, ועל כן היתה החתימה חונן הדעת, על החסד הכולל לכל המין, שהם המושכלות הראשונות, לא על החסד הפרטי, אבל התפלה ראוי שתהיה על יותר מן הדעת והבינה, שהוא ההשכל, שההשכל הוא בדברים האלהיים, כאמרו השכל וידוע אותי (ירמיהו ט' כ"ג).</p>
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Other versions of this blessing use the terms *chochmah*, *binah*, *v'daat*. These terms and the order in which they appear in the berachah express the same basic idea as above.

5. Rabbi Zev Leff, Shemoneh Esrei, pg. 85 – An explanation of *chochmah*, *binah*, *v'daat* (wisdom, insight, and understanding).

We ask that G-d grant us “*deah, binah v'haskef*.” Here we find various words connoting wisdom. In the Ashkenaz text we find the words *daat*, *binah*, and *haskef*; in the Sefard text it is *chochmah*, *binah*, and *daat*.

There are many interpretations as to the specific meaning of each of these terms. Some say that *chochmah*, when used in relation to *binah* and *daat*, connotes the process of integrating factual data and analyzing that data in order to arrive at the truth while eliminating that which is erroneous and false. It is the first step to acquiring wisdom.

Binah (insight) derives from the word *boneh*, to build, and connotes building onto that database by inference, deduction, and induction, being sensitive to the implications of the data and deriving the proper conclusions.

In this context, *daat* is the final stage of taking the knowledge and its implications and putting them into a practical framework, applying them to real situations and living by them.

Key Themes of בינה – Insight.

- The prayer for wisdom heads the section of requests, because without insight, prayer is meaningless; we need to understand what is good for us and for the world before we can begin to pray for it. Furthermore, it is wisdom and understanding that ensure our overall physical and spiritual well-being.
- Intelligence is not a given but rather a gift that G-d can bestow or withhold at will. Hence, it is appropriate to pray to G-d for it.
- When we ask for wisdom, knowledge, and understanding, we are really asking for information, the ability to understand that information, and the capability of applying that understanding to better our lives.

Berachah 5. תשובה (*Teshuvah*) – Repentance

הַשִּׁיבֵנוּ אֲבִינוּ לְתוֹרָתְךָ. וְקַרְבֵנוּ מִלְּפָנֶיךָ לְעֲבוֹדָתְךָ וְהַחְזִירֵנוּ בְּתַשׁוּבָה שְׁלֵמָה לְפָנֶיךָ. בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה הַרּוֹצֶה בְּתַשׁוּבָה.

Return us, our Father, to Your Torah, and bring us near, our King, to Your service, and influence us to return in perfect repentance before You. Blessed are You, G-d, Who desires repentance.

Once we have insight, our first task is to use it to turn inward and analyze our relationship with G-d and with the other people in our lives.

1. Rabbi Asher Meir, Meaning in Mitzvot – Self-awareness and moral understanding are the prerequisites to real teshuvah.

The fifth berachah requesting repentance (teshuvah) follows the fourth, a prayer for understanding (bina) because we learn from the words of our prophets that understanding precedes repentance. This emphasizes the fact that ideal repentance is not merely an emotion, a subjective feeling of being born again. On the contrary: the basis for repentance is that a reasoned recognition is required of how one strayed and why the way of the Torah is proper.

Rav Saadiah Gaon taught his disciples to examine their ways every day even if they felt certain they had not sinned. Rav Saadiah himself had adopted this practice after an enlightening experience. Once, Rav Saadiah lodged with an innkeeper who was unaware of his illustrious guest's true identity. He put the Rav in a simple room and served him as he would any guest. When word circulated that the leader of the generation was passing through town, all the townsfolk flocked to the inn to glimpse Rav Saadiah. The innkeeper suddenly realized the greatness of his guest and approached the Rav, with tears streaming down his cheeks.

"Rebbi, please forgive me!" "Forgive you? What have you done wrong? You treated me very well," he replied. "Rabbi, I didn't know who you were! Believe me, had I know that the great Rav Saadiah Gaon was staying under my roof, I would have treated you like royalty!"

Hearing these sincere words, Rav Saadiah himself burst into tears. "From your words," he explained, "I now understand the extent of our obligation towards our King, G-d. Previously, I felt I was serving G-d well, but now I realize that I am lacking. Just as your service to me changes as you perceive my identity more clearly, so too should be my service of G-d. With each passing day, I discover new levels of G-d's kindness towards me. I realize that whatever respect and service I offered G-d yesterday was woefully insufficient, for had I known then what I know now about G-d, I would have served Him with even greater devotion and intensity. Life is indeed a constant cycle of rediscovery in which a person sheds the relative ignorance of the past. (From Rabbi Avrohom Chaim Feuer, Shemoneh Esrei, pp. 109-109)

Part A. What is Teshuvah?

The theme of teshuvah is that of relationships. The relationship between G-d and Israel is compared to the relationship between husband and wife (see Shir HaShirim/Song of Songs 1:1, with Rashi). Having strayed afar, teshuvah is the means by which we can draw close once again – close to G-d, and close to our inner selves.

But before we can understand what teshuvah is, we need to understand the Jewish conception of sin.

1. Rabbi Shimon Apisdorf, Rosh HaShanah Yom Kippur Survival Kit, Leviathan Press, p.102 – Dealing with mistakes.

One of the most common words in your prayer book is “sin.” It’s not a very pleasant sounding word. Certainly no one wants to look at himself or herself as a sinner. In Hebrew, the generic term for sin is *chet*. This term literally means “to make a mistake.” Sins, no thanks. But mistakes – sure – we all make mistakes.

How do we correct the mistakes of our past and avoid repeating them in the future? If we can understand this, then we possess the key to unlocking an enormous reservoir of latent potential for greatness that would otherwise lie dormant.

This is teshuvah. The common translation of teshuvah is “repentance.” Again, a rather foreign sounding idea. The proper translation of the word teshuvah is “to return.” Teshuvah is an animated technique for locating the rationalizations that lie at the root of our mistakes: recognizing them, dealing with them, and eliminating them.

This world is a place full of obstacles and stumbling blocks. Indeed, we stumble and fall, succumbing to at least some of the pitfalls that cross our path. As the Talmud teaches, there is no human being who never sins (Sanhedrin 46b, based on Kohelet/Ecclesiastes 7). G-d knows that our journey in this world is precarious and has therefore given us a great gift: the gift of teshuvah, the power to return.

2. Rabbi Chaim Friedlander, Siftei Chaim – Mo’adim, Vol. I, pp. 249-250 – Transgression creates barriers between ourselves and G-d, and sullies our soul; teshuvah removes those barriers and impurities.

When a person transgresses, he sullies his soul. This impurity cuts him off and separates him from G-d. As long as the impurity is present, he is distanced from G-d. The request “forgive us” [in the daily Shemoneh Esrei] is essentially a request to remove the barrier [between ourselves and G-d]...

Every mitzvah brings a person closer to G-d [the root of the word *mitzvah* shares the same root as the word *tzevat*, a pair of pliers, a device for bonding two entities]. In contrast, every transgression distances a person from G-d. The worst part of transgression is...mainly that it causes him to be distant from G-d. Therefore, the ultimate aim of teshuvah is to return and regain our original closeness to G-d.

כאשר אדם חוטא מטמא הוא את נשמתו, טומאה זו חוצצת ומרחקתו מה', וכל עוד החטאים קיימים מרוחק הוא מהשי"ת. בקשת "סלח לנו" היא מחיקת החטא כדי להסיר את החציצה הזאת...

כל מצוה ומצוה שעושה מקרבת אותו יותר אל ה'. לעומת זאת החטא מרחיק מה'. האסון הגדול שבחטא הוא... בעיקר – הריחוק. מטרת התשובה היא אפוא – לשוב להתקרב אליו.

Jewish sources spell out four distinct steps in the process of doing teshuvah.

3. Rambam (Maimonides), Hilchot Teshuvah (Laws of Repentance), 2:2, 9 – The components of teshuvah: regret, cessation, confession, resolution, and if necessary, asking forgiveness from others.

How does one do teshuvah?	ומה היא התשובה
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The transgressor stops doing the transgression and removes it from his thoughts... He resolves that he will not do it again in the future... He regrets [what he did] in the past... He verbally expresses his wrongdoings to G-d and makes a verbal resolution for the future. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> הוא שיעזוב החוטא חטאו ויסירו ממחשבתו ויגמור בלבו שלא יעשהו עוד וכן יתנחם על שעבר וצריך להתודות בשפתיו ולומר עניינות אלו שגמר בלבו.
Regarding wrongdoings against one's fellow man...one is not forgiven until he reimburses whatever he owes and attains the other person's forgiveness.	עבירות שבין אדם לחבירו... אינו נמחל לו לעולם עד שיתן לחבירו מה שהוא חייב לו וירצהו

Part B. Asking for Repentance

Since all the steps of repentance are up to us, not G-d, how can we ask Him to make us do teshuvah?

The answer is that we initiate the teshuvah process, and we ask G-d to help us complete the task. We need only make the first step, and the rest of the course will be met with Divine assistance.

1. Talmud Bavli, Yoma 38b – If we want to grow spiritually, then G-d will help us.

One who comes to purify himself is assisted by Heaven.	בא לטהר - מסייעין אותו.
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2. Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan, Handbook of Jewish Thought, Vol. II, 15:59 – Initiate the first move to return to G-d, and He will return to you.

Even if one has lived a completely unG-dly life, he should not give up hope and feel that it is impossible for him to change his way of life [Ramban/Nachmanides on Devarim/Deuteronomy 30:11]. Our Sages teach us that, "All beginnings are difficult" [Rashi on Shemot/Exodus 19:5]. G-d thus gives a person every opportunity, and once he makes the initial effort to do teshuvah, he is given Divine help [Shabbat 104a]. G-d told His prophet, "Return to Me, and I will return to you" [Malachi 3:7]. Our Sages teach us that G-d says, "Make an opening for Me like the eye of a needle, and I will open wide for you the gates of heaven" [Shir HaShirim/Song of Songs Rabbah 5:3].
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Part C. השיבנו אבינו לתורתך – Back to Torah

Why do we ask to be brought back to Torah? What if we were never there – connected to Torah – in the first place?

The answer is that at one point or another we all were.

1. Talmud Bavli, Niddah 30b – A fetus is taught the entire Torah in utero.

Rabbi Simlai delivered the following discourse: What is a fetus like when it is in the womb of its mother?... it is taught all the Torah from beginning to end... As soon as it sees the light, an angel approaches, slaps it on its mouth and causes it to forget all the Torah completely.	דרש רבי שמלאי: למה הולד דומה במעי אמו... ומלמדין אותו כל התורה כולה... וכיון שבא לאויר העולם - בא מלאך וסטר על פיו, ומשכחו כל התורה כולה.
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2. Rabbi Avrohom Chaim Feuer, Shemoneh Esrei, pg. 111 – Without Torah, a Jew is estranged from himself.

The plea, <i>Bring us back</i> , reminds us that Torah study is never a new experience for any Jew. It is always a return to his roots, a repetition of an earlier encounter, for the Talmud (Niddah 30b) relates, an angel teaches each Jew the entire Torah while still an embryo in his mother's womb. This means that Torah is imprinted on our chromosomes and implanted in our genes, literally interwoven into the fabric of our being. Just before birth, the angel strikes the babe on the mouth, causing the Torah to disappear from his lips and recede into his sub-conscious. A Jew spends his lifetime studying the Torah texts in order to extract the Torah treasures buried within him. He can never really know himself until he knows the Torah. Without Torah, the Jew is estranged from himself, stumbling from one identity crisis to another, vainly sifting through alien cultures in order to discover his life's meaning. For this reason, we cry out, <i>Bring us back ... to Your Torah</i> – imbue us with that homing instinct which brings the dove back to its nest and the Jew back to the core of his being.
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Part D. הרוצה בתשובה – G-d Desires Repentance

At the conclusion of this berachah, we praise G-d for desiring teshuvah. But why does G-d want teshuvah? Wouldn't it be better if none of us ever sinned in the first place?

Judaism teaches that our G-d is a loving G-d. Though He gives us many laws and we do make mistakes, nevertheless He does not desire to punish us but rather that we do teshuvah.

1. Yechezkel (Ezekiel) 33:11 – G-d does not wish to punish the sinner.

Say to them: As I live, says the L-rd G-d, I do not wish for the death of the wicked, but for the wicked to repent of his ways so that he may live. Repent, repent of your evil ways, for why should you die, O House of Israel!	אמר אליהם חי אני נאם אדני יקוק אם אחפץ במות הרשע כי אם בשוב רשע מדרכו וחיה שובו שובו מדרכיכם הרעים ולמה תמותו בית ישראל:
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On closer examination, though, we see that the wording of our blessing is not just that G-d *prefers* teshuvah, He actually *desires* it. Indeed, we find that teshuvah is woven into the fabric of creation. But again, wouldn't it be better if no one ever sinned in the first place?

2. Talmud Bavli, Pesachim 54a – Teshuvah was created before the world.

Seven things were created before the world. They are: the Torah, teshuvah...	שבעה דברים נבראו קודם שנברא העולם ואלו הן תורה ותשובה ...
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The fact that teshuvah was created before the world itself, implies that a person can do teshuvah even without having sinned. The world was created “at a distance” from G-d, and repentance draws it close. Repentance, in this sense, defines the most fundamental desire of G-d for the world. Fittingly, it is the only request of the Shemoneh Esrei prayer that is described as G-d's desire.

But what does it mean that G-d desires teshuvah?

The Chassidic master, Rabbi Mendele of Rimanov, was once walking with his disciples when they encountered a weeping child. “We are playing hide-and-seek,” the child cried. “I have hidden myself, but no one is trying to find me.” Rabbi Mendele turned to his followers. “Now,” he said, “can you not appreciate the distress of G-d, Who has concealed Himself in the universe, and commissioned man to search for and find Him? How painful it must be to G-d that people go their own ways and do not search for Him!” (From Rabbi Avrohom Chaim Feuer, Shemoneh Esrei, pg. 114)

G-d desires teshuvah because the whole point of His creation is for us to freely choose to look for Him. But creation is not simply a childish game of cosmic hide-and-seek. The process of searching for G-d is part and parcel of our own spiritual development. (See further Rav Yitzchak Hutner, Pachad Yitzchak, Igros U'Michtavim, Siman 9, p. 13.)

3. Rabbi Yitzchak Berkovits, Jerusalem Kollel – Teshuvah is the process of advancing toward self-perfection.

Teshuvah in its global sense doesn't mean rebounding from something bad. Teshuvah means coming closer to G-d. It is a process of personal growth towards perfection. When G-d created us, He gave us the ability for growth and to reach perfection, as well as specific times that are propitious for accomplishing that.

In his legal compendium, the Mishnah Torah, Rambam puts the ideas of free will, reward and punishment, even perfecting our character all into his Chapter of Hilchot Teshuvah, the Laws of Repentance. Character traits are things we are born with, but we understand that we need to grow. The Rambam calls that teshuvah. The growth process is called teshuvah.

We may look at teshuvah as some kind of post-hoc fix. We may mistakenly think that ideally there should be no need for it. What can you do? If you make mistakes, you have to do teshuvah. But that is not the understanding expressed in the Shemoneh Esrei.

“Blessed are You, our G-d, Who desires teshuvah.” G-d constantly desires our teshuvah. He wants us to strive towards perfection and build a close relationship with Him!

4. Based on Rabbi Zelig Pliskin, Gateway to Happiness, pg. 378 (and Rabbi Reuven Leuchter) – Improvement toward perfection happens in small steps.

When working on improving ourselves, it is easy to become discouraged because we do not see sufficient progress. Keep trying and do not give up. Every small amount of improvement is a success (Rabbi Reuven Dessler; T'nuat HaMussar, Vol.V, pg. 174).

Learn to appreciate even the minutest improvement. If you become angry one time less than before or with less intensity, that itself is improvement. If you speak a little more kindly to others, that is improvement. If your prayers are ever so slightly improved, that is improvement. The more pleasure you feel with each drop of improvement, the more likely you will keep trying to improve.

(Nor should you become discouraged by failure, for every time you fail, you will have learned something about yourself that can help you grow in the future.)

Key Themes of תשובה – Repentance.

- Teshuvah means developing our relationship with G-d, others, and ourselves. Sins are mistakes, while teshuvah is the process of recognizing those mistakes and fixing the damage they caused to these relationships.
- The basic formula for teshuvah is to stop transgressing now, resolve not to repeat the behavior in the future, regret what you did in the past while confessing all this to G-d. Sins toward other people require a fifth component – one must ask forgiveness (*méchilah*) and if necessary reimburse the offended individual.
- It is up to us to start the process of teshuvah. In this berachah we ask G-d to help us complete it.
- We ask to be returned to the Torah because the Torah is at the spiritual center of every Jewish soul.
- At the conclusion of this berachah, we praise G-d for desiring teshuvah, because that means He wants us to draw close to Him by perfecting ourselves.

See also the two Morasha shiurim on teshuvah.

Berachah 6. סליחה (Selichah) – Forgiveness

סִלַּח לָנוּ אֲבוּנוּ כִּי חָטֵאנוּ. מַחֵל לָנוּ מִלִּפְנֵינוּ כִּי פָשַׁעְנוּ. כִּי מוֹחֵל וְסוֹלֵחַ אַתָּה. בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה חַנוּן הַמְרַבֵּה לְסִלָּת.

Forgive us, our Father, for we have erred; pardon us, our King, for we have willfully sinned; for You pardon and forgive. Blessed are You, G-d, the gracious One Who forgives abundantly.

Once we have turned to make an effort to improve ourselves (in the previous berachah), we realize the extent of our past failures. Such awareness prompts us to then ask for forgiveness.

1. Rabbi Avrohom Chaim Feuer, Shemoneh Esrei, pg. 117 – The request for forgiveness is predicated upon having first done teshuvah.

This plea for forgiveness follows our request for repentance. First, we repent, abandon our past sins, and commit ourselves to improvement; only then can we sincerely ask G-d to forgive and eradicate our misdeeds. One who asks for pardon *before* he stops sinning is described as *one who immerses himself in purifying waters while grasping an impure creature in his hand* (Taanit 16a). His immersion serves no purpose, because he continues to contaminate himself. So, too, one cannot expect forgiveness for sins that he continues to commit or to harbor.

Part A. Avinu Malkeinu

This blessing and the previous one are the only blessings that refer to G-d as “Avinu Malkeinu,” our Father and King, a refrain known to many from the popular High Holidays tune. What is the significance of this phrase and why is it only used in the blessings of teshuvah and forgiveness?

The originator of the Avinu Malkeinu prayer was Rabbi Akiva, as is told in the following Talmudic story:

1. Talmud Bavli, Ta’anit 25b – Rabbi Akiva was the first to use the formulation of “Avinu Malkeinu” as a prayer to G-d.

It is related that Rabbi Eliezer once [during a drought] stepped down before the Ark [in synagogue] and recited the twenty-four blessings for fast days, but his prayer was not answered. Rabbi Akiva stepped down after him and exclaimed: “Our Father, our King, we have no King but You; our Father, our King, for Your sake, have mercy upon us,” and rain fell.

Why do we relate to G-d as both a father and a king in the blessings of teshuvah and forgiveness? The reason can be derived from the following insight relating to the Avinu Malkeinu prayer recited during the Ten Days of Teshuvah.

2. Rabbi Abraham J. Twerski, MD, Growing Each Day, 3 Tishrei on Aish.com – We want G-d to forgive us in mercy as a father would a child; at the same time, though, we need to treat G-d with the respect worthy of a king.

As children of G-d, we have the right to plead for mercy, just as we would expect a human father to be kind and compassionate with his errant child. Actions that might elicit stern judgment from strangers do not provoke a similar reaction from one’s own father. In praying for Divine forgiveness for our misdeeds, we are therefore not asking for the extraordinary, but simply for the natural

response of a father toward a child. Even if our actions deserve rebuke, we ask that the discipline should be tempered by paternal compassion.

But if we ask to be treated as children, we must relate to G-d the way the Torah expects a child to relate to a parent, with respect and reverence. We cannot expect a parent-child relationship to be one-directional.

The Talmud speaks harshly of someone who profanes that which is sacred, going so far as to deny him a share in the eternal world, even though he may have performed many mitzvot (Ethics of the Fathers 3:15). This is because although no one is perfect, and while sins can be forgiven, if one is irreverent toward holiness and lacks the respect for G-d that should characterize a child-parent relationship, then such a person may forfeit forgiveness. For example, halachic authorities sharply criticize one who converses during the prayer services. While this is not a Biblical transgression, it indicates disrespect for the Divine Presence.

During these days of penitence, as we recite the prayer of Avinu Malkeinu (our Father, our King), we should give thought to the concept of reverence for our Father and try to behave in a manner that befits a child of G-d.

Part B. Forgiveness and Pardon

What is the difference between the “forgiveness” that we ask of G-d as our Father and the “pardon” that we ask of Him as our King?

1. Rabbi Yonatan Eibeschitz, Ya’arot Devash, Vol. I, pg. 8b – When we repeatedly transgress, we deepen the rebellion against G-d and thereby perceive Him in the more distant role, as a king, rather than the more intimate role, as a father.

When a person sins once or twice, he is still in the category of a son. But when a person repeats his sin often, granted he may still be considered a son, but only a wayward and rebellious one. For it is known that when a person repeats a sin two or three times, he is considered a wanton sinner. This is what it means when we say “forgive us, our Father, for we have erred,” since at that point we are still considered as a child to his father. [Then we say,] “Pardon us, our King, for we have willfully sinned,” for at this stage we have descended [in our repeated defiance] from the status of children to that of servants, G-d being more like our king and master rather than our father.

כשאדם חוטא א' או פעמיים עדיין הוא בבחינת בן להקב"ה אבל כשריבה לחטוא אלו ה' בבחינת בן יהי' נדון כבן סורר... ונודע כי השב על דבר פעמיים ושלש יקר' פושע... וזהו כונת אמרינו סלח לנו אבינו כי חטאנו כי אז אנחנו עדיין בבחינת בן לאב ומחל לנו מלכנו כי פשענו כי אז אנו יורדים ממדרגת בן רק במדרגת עבד. והוא מלכנו ואדונינו ולא אבינו.

Similarly, the expressions of forgive and pardon are matched up with Father and King respectively.

2. Avudraham, Shemoneh Esrei – We ask for pardon when we offend and forgiveness when we wish to wipe the slate clean.

<p><i>Selichah</i> (forgiveness) and <i>chet</i> (sin) are juxtaposed to Father, while <i>mechilah</i> (pardon) and <i>pesha</i> (willful sin) are juxtaposed to King,” because a son’s willful transgressions are seen by his father as mistakes and are readily forgiven, just as <i>chet</i> is less severe than <i>pesha</i>. But a king will regard even the errors of his people as willful sins, and that is why we say “<i>pasbanu</i> (willfully sinned),” for <i>pesha</i> is more severe than <i>chet</i>. In the same vein, “<i>mechilah</i>” is something we request if we have offended someone who is particular and exacting; however it is not appropriate to ask him for “<i>selichah</i>” for an offense (as if it was accidental). However, to a father who is less exacting it is appropriate to ask for “<i>selichah</i>,” meaning that no trace of ill will should remain.</p>	<p>וסמך סליחה וחסא לאב ומחילה ופשע למלך מפני שכל זדונות שעושה הבן דומות לפני האב כשגגות ונקלים יהיו בעיניו לסלחם כמו שחטא נקל מפשע. ולפני המלך דומות שגגות העם כזדונות ולכן יש לומר לו כי פשענו לפי שפשע גדול מהחטא, ומחילה יש לבקש מכל אדם המקפיד ומדקדק שימחול לו עלבוננו, אבל אין לומר שיסלח לו עלבוננו. ולכן יש לומר לאב שאינו מקפיד ומדקדק כל כך סלח לנו כלומר שאף הקפדה מועטת לא תשאר.</p>
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Mechilah implies that we cannot deny we have done wrong, just that we want to get off the hook for it. Selichah implies that the transgression can be ignored as if nothing ever happened.

For those who daven (pray) *nusach* Ashkenaz (the prayer format of Jews of European, non-Chassidic descent), why is the order of pardon (סְלִיחָה) and forgiveness (מְחִילָה) switched when repeated later in the same blessing? (For those who daven *nusach* Sefard [Chassidic format], the words are not reversed – only pardon is mentioned again – and this is therefore not a question).

3. Rabbi Zev Leff, Shemoneh Esrei, pg. 122 – There are three reasons for reversing the order of pardon and forgiveness.

<p>[This means that] even though we have sinned, still You pardon and forgive consistently.</p> <p>The order of the terms <i>selichah</i> and <i>mechilah</i> is reversed from the order of these terms in the beginning of the berachah, for several reasons:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. G-d will first pardon the rebellious acts and render them unintentional, and then forgive all the unintentional sins and nullify them completely. 2. The beginning of the berachah was a prayer, so we began with the more lenient sin and proceeded to the more severe sin. This part of the berachah is a praise of G-d. Therefore, we praise His pardoning of our severe sins first, since this is a greater feat, and then mention the lesser sins. 3. In the beginning we said that perhaps we have sinned unintentionally and even possibly rebelliously. If so, we continue, pardon the rebellions first, because those are the most damaging.

Key Themes of סליחה – Forgiveness.

- Once we have done teshuvah, we can then approach G-d for forgiveness.
- This berachah for forgiveness and the previous one for teshuvah refer to G-d as our Father and our King. The reason is that when it comes to teshuvah and forgiveness, we rely on G-d's mercy, as a child would rely on his father's mercy. At the same time, we recognize that we must show the proper reverence for our Father in Heaven and respect Him as the King.
- We ask for forgiveness from G-d as a Father, referring to a minor level of transgression for which we hope to clean the slate. Pardon we ask of G-d as our King in recognition of our undeniably greater transgressions.
- The order of forgiveness and pardon is switched in the conclusion of the berachah. This switch might be because first we request these things and then we praise G-d for being the One Who does them. Pardoning severe transgressions is a greater feat than forgiving minor ones.

Berachah 7. גאולה (Geulah) – Redemption

רֵאֵה בְּעֵינֵינוּ. וְרִיבָה רִיבֵנוּ. וּגְאֹלֵנוּ מִהֶרָה לְמַעַן שְׁמֶךָ. כִּי גֹאֵל חַזֵּק אַתָּה. בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה גֹּאֵל יִשְׂרָאֵל.

Behold our affliction, take up our grievance, and Redeem us speedily for Your Name's sake, for You are a Powerful Redeemer. Blessed are You, G-d, Redeemer of Israel.

This next berachah is for salvation, not for the ultimate national salvation of the Messianic era but rather for personal salvation from day-to-day troubles. Such trials and tribulations come in many forms, and we need G-d's help to stand up to them. Having asked for forgiveness and release from spiritual impediments, we now turn to G-d and ask Him to liberate us from the emotional pain and mental anguish our problems impose upon us.

This berachah is paraphrased from the following verse in Psalms:

1. Tehillim (Psalms) 119:153-54 – The source in Tehillim for the blessing of redemption.

See my affliction and release me, for I have not forgotten Your Torah. Fight my cause and redeem me; for Your word sustains me.	ראה עניי וחלצני כי תורתך לא שכחתי: ריבה ריבי וגאלני לאמרתך חייני:
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Part A. Redemption from Personal Suffering

1. Rashi, Commentary to Talmud Bavli, Megillah 17b – This berachah is about personal redemption.

The redemption (in this berachah) is not the (national) redemption from exile but rather that we be redeemed from troubles that constantly come upon us.	האי גאולה לאו גאולה דגלות היא, אלא שיגאלנו מן הצרות הבאות עלינו תמיד.
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We pray to G-d to take away our suffering, but isn't there a reason that people suffer? Aren't there also good things that come from it?

As we will see below, Judaism recognizes what can be gained from life's difficulties. Yet, we pray not to have to suffer – how can we resolve this seeming contradiction?

To understand this paradox, let us consider some positive aspects of suffering. Firstly, suffering can be a catalyst for personal change.

2. Talmud Bavli, Berachot 5a – Suffering motivates one to introspect.

Rava, and some say Rav Chisda, stated: If a person sees that circumstances of suffering have befallen him, he should examine his deeds, as it is stated, "Let us search our ways and introspect and come close to G-d" (Eichah/Lamentations 3:40).	אמר רבא ואיתימא רב חסדא: אם רואה אדם שיסורין באין עליו - יפשפש במעשיו, שנאמר (איכה ג:מ) "נחפשה דרכינו ונחקורה ונשובה עד ה'".
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Suffering can also purify our souls and be a source of reward in the Next World.

3. Ramchal (Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto), Derech Hashem (The Way of G-d) 2:2:5 – Suffering sensitizes and purifies.

Good deeds incorporate an intrinsic quality of perfection and excellence into man's body and soul. Evil deeds, on the other hand, incorporate in him a quality of insensitivity and deficiency, all precisely congruent with the deeds...	המעשים טובים מעצימים הם באדם, בגופו ונפשו, מציאות שלמות ומעלה, והפכה המעשים הרעים מעצימים בו מציאות עכירות וחסרון, והכל בשעור מדקדק כפי מה שהם המעשים...
The Highest Mercy therefore decreed that some sort of purification exist. This is the general category of suffering. G-d gave suffering the power to dispel the insensitivity in man, allowing him to become pure and clear.	גזר החסד העליון, שימצא לו צירוף, והוא כלל הייסורין, ששם יתברך שמו בסגולתם להסיר מאותו האדם העכירות ההוא, ויישאר זך ובהיר מוכן לטובה בזמן הראוי.

Even though we can appreciate suffering as atonement and as a catalyst for introspection and growth, we are not gluttons for punishment; we still ask G-d to take away the suffering.

4. Talmud Bavli, Berachot 5b – Some of our greatest sages would have preferred not to suffer.

Rabbi Chiya b. Abba fell ill, and Rabbi Yochanan went in to visit him. He said to him: Are your sufferings welcome to you? He replied: Neither they nor their reward... Rabbi Yochanan once fell ill, and Rabbi Chanina went in to visit him. He said to him: Are your sufferings welcome to you? He replied: Neither they nor their reward.	רבי חייא בר אבא חלש, על לגביה רבי יוחנן. אמר ליה: חביבין עליך יסורין? אמר ליה: לא הן ולא שכרן.... רבי יוחנן חלש, על לגביה רבי חנינא. אמר ליה: חביבין עליך יסורין? אמר ליה: לא הן ולא שכרן.
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5. Rabbi Avrohom Chaim Feuer, Shemoneh Esrei, pg. 122 – We ask G-d to ease the burdens that are too much for us to bear.

This blessing is a fervent plea for personal triumph over adversity; a petition to be released from the incessant perils and problems of everyday existence. We do not ask for a life without challenges and struggles, for such a life would lack meaning; rather we ask for relief in the areas of suffering and stress with which we feel we cannot cope. Some people feel trapped in a difficult marriage, others are shackled to an unsatisfying job. Some are crushed by financial burdens, others face deep trouble with the law. Everyone is under some sort of pressure. We turn to G-d and cry for help. "Forsake me not. Only You can soothe the pain. If You are with me, I am not alone; I will survive."	
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Part B. We Do Not Understand the Reasons for Suffering

Although we can appreciate the benefits of suffering and the need for it in the big picture, the seeming randomness and lack of justice in the world is beyond our comprehension. Nevertheless, we must have faith that everything G-d does is for the best.

1. Pirkei Avot (Ethics of the Fathers) 4:14 – We cannot grasp Divine justice.

Rav Yanai taught: We cannot understand the peace of the wicked or the suffering of the righteous.	ר' ינאי אומר אין בידינו לא משלוות הרשעים ואף לא מייסורי צדיקים.
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2. Rabbeinu Yonah, ibid. – We know, but do not understand.

We know that in truth there is an explanation for the matter but we are not capable of comprehending it.	שאנחנו יודעים באמת שיש טענה לדבר ואין אנו משיגין לדעת אותה.
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Faith means trusting that G-d is just, even though we perceive injustice in the world.

3. Rambam, Mishnah Berachot 9:5 – G-d's ways are beyond us.

The fundamental principle is that G-d rewards the righteous and punishes the evil; everything is just. However, we are incapable of comprehending G-d's system of justice, since we cannot understand the "mind" of G-d. The Torah teaches us that we are not capable of comprehending G-d's Wisdom or the justice of His judgments in all that He does. This idea is stated in the verse, "Just as the heavens are higher than the earth, so too are G-d's ways beyond your ways and G-d's thoughts beyond your thoughts" (Yeshayahu/Isaiah 55:9).	היסוד הוא כי הקב"ה יגמול לטובים ויענש הרעים, והכל משפט... ודרך הצדק בהם אין ביכולת אדם להשיגו, כאשר אין בכח שכל אדם להיות שכלו כולל דעת הקב"ה, וכבר הודיענו הכתוב כי אין ביכולת רעיונינו להשיג חכמתו וצדק דיניו בכל מה שפעל ויפעל, והוא מה שאמר (ישעיה נה: ט) כי גבהו שמים מארץ כן גבהו דרכי מדרכיכם ומחשבותי ממחשבותיכם
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4. Rabbi Yitzchok Kirzner, Making Sense of Suffering, ArtScroll, pp. 5, 7 – Trust extends beyond intellectual endeavor.

<p>G-d in His essence is unknowable, but that does not mean He does not exist. The totality of His ways is unfathomable, but that does not mean He has no ways. Intellectual endeavor remains crucial, but it must be coupled with another element: trust. Trust is what we are left with when we have gone as far as we can towards intellectual understanding and have still not obtained satisfactory answers. Trust is the certainty that there is sense to G-d's ways even when we are denied access to those ways...</p> <p>G-d could have created us with the intellectual capacity to understand every mitzvah (including the <i>chukim</i> [Torah laws beyond human comprehension]). Or He could have limited the Torah to only those mitzvot that we are capable of comprehending (<i>eyduyot</i> and <i>mishpatim</i>). But He did neither. Rather, He gave us the <i>chukim</i> to introduce the element of trust into our relationship with Him. We do not understand them. We observe them because we trust Him.</p>	
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For more on the meaning of suffering, see the Morasha Class entitled, "Towards Understanding Suffering & Adversity."

Key Themes of גאולה – Redemption.

- The redemption referred to in this berachah is that of personal redemption from pain and suffering.
- There are benefits to suffering, such as the introspection it prompts and the purification it affords the soul. Nevertheless we still ask G-d to help us out of suffering because we are human after all.
- We do not ask for an easy life or a life without challenges. But we want those challenges to be productive rather than debilitating.
- Even when we can sense no rhyme or reason to our suffering, we must still have faith that everything that G-d does is for the best. Faith means trusting in G-d's inherent goodness even when we personally cannot perceive it.

Berachah 8. רפואה (Refuah) – Healing

רָפְאֵנוּ יְהוָה וְנִרְפָּא. הוֹשִׁיעֵנו וְנִשְׁעָה כִּי תִהְיֶה אֲתָה. וְהַעֲלֵה רְפוּאָה שְׁלֵמָה לְכָל מַכּוֹתֵינוּ. כִּי אֵל מֶלֶךְ
רוֹפֵא נֶאֱמָן וְרַחֲמָן אַתָּה. בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה רוֹפֵא חוֹלֵי עַמּוֹ יִשְׂרָאֵל.

Heal us G-d – then we will be healed; Save us – then we will be saved, for You are our praise. Bring complete recovery for all our ailments, for You are G-d, King, the faithful and compassionate Healer. Blessed are You, G-d, Who heals the sick of His people Israel.

Once we have prayed for relief from external burdens and anguish, we then ask G-d to grant us physical well-being.

Why do we pray to be healed? Shouldn't we just go to a doctor for that? Is prayer in lieu of seeking treatment? Or conversely, does going to a doctor demonstrate that we don't really believe G-d can heal us?

In order to appreciate what it means that we pray for healing, we will explore the Jewish view of the roles of doctors and prayer in the healing process.

Part A. The Role of Doctors

The Torah tells us that when one person injures another, the assailant must pay his victim's medical expenses. The Sages derive from this law that it must, therefore, be permissible to go to a doctor for treatment.

1. Shemot 21:19; Talmud, Bava Kamma 85a – The Torah, in requiring a damager to pay medical bills, implies that doctors have permission to heal.

“He shall cause him to be thoroughly healed” (Shemot 21:19) – from here we learn that the Torah has given doctors the license to heal.	ורפא ירפא (שמות כ"א, י"ט) - מכאן שניתן רשות לרופא לרפאות.
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What is so novel about being allowed to go to a doctor? Shouldn't such “permission” be obvious? Not exactly. One might think that since we believe in an all-powerful G-d Who is in control of everything, perhaps we should not interfere with His plan when someone gets hurt or falls sick. The verse comes to teach us that seeking treatment does not interfere with G-d's plan.

2. Ibid., Commentary of Rashi – Healing does not interfere with G-d's plan.

We do not fault the doctor by claiming he had no right to interfere with G-d's plan that the person get hurt.	ולא אמרינן רחמנא מחי ואיהו מסי.
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We find two seemingly contradictory views of the role of doctors in the writings of Ramban and Rambam (both of whom, incidentally, were practicing doctors).

3. Ramban, Commentary to Vayikra (Leviticus) 26:11 – Ideally, people should seek prophets rather than doctors.

<p>When Bnei Yisrael are at peace [with G-d], their lives will not proceed according to the laws of nature at all, whether in regard to their bodies or their land, whether to the individual or to the nation as a whole. Rather, G-d will bless their bread and their water and will remove all illness from them such that they will not need doctors or medicine. Thus it is written (Shemot 15:26), “I am G-d Who heals you.”</p> <p>That is in fact what the righteous did during the times of prophecy – if they transgressed and fell ill, they sought out the prophets and not the doctors. One who consults prophets does not consult doctors, for how can there be room for doctors in G-d's House when He has promised (Shemot 23:25) to bless your bread and water and remove illness from amongst you!</p>	<p>והכלל כי בהיות ישראל שלמים והם רבים, לא יתנהג ענינם בטבע כלל, לא בגופם, ולא בארצם, לא בכללם, ולא ביחיד מהם, כי יברך השם לחמם ומימם, ויסיר מחלה מקרבם, עד שלא יצטרכו לרופא ולהשתמר בדרך מדרכי הרפואות כלל, כמו שאמר (שמות טו כו) כי אני ה' רופאך.</p> <p>וכן היו הצדיקים עושים בזמן הנבואה, גם כי יקרה עון שיחלו לא ידרשו ברופאים רק בנביאים... אבל הדורש השם בנביא לא ידרוש ברופאים. ומה חלק לרופאים בבית עושי רצון השם אחר שהבטיח וברך את לחמך ואת מימך והסירותי מחלה מקרבך.</p>
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But people do seem to get sick from natural causes, and medicine does seem to help. Surely not all sickness and healing are mediated by transgression and repentance. Ramban admits as such but says that the reason nature runs its course with us is that we give in to it.

4. Ibid. – The only reason we need medicine is because we have chosen to live according to the dictates of the natural world rather than seeing our relationship with G-d as the source of our well-being.

<p>This is what the Talmudic dictum means when it says that “people by rights should not seek treatment, nevertheless such is their custom” (Berachot 60a). If people did not seek treatment, then they would only get sick due to sin and would be healed by the will of G-d. However, since they do in fact seek treatment, G-d lets them be governed by the forces of nature. This is what it means that “permission was granted for the healer to heal.” It does not say that the sick person was granted permission to seek treatment. Rather, if he goes to a doctor because such is his inclination since he is not part of the community of G-d Whose portion is life, the doctor need not refrain from healing him...But G-d's will is that people not have anything to do with doctors.</p>	<p>והוא מאמרם (ברכות ס א) שאין דרכם של בני אדם ברפואות אלא שנהגו, אילו לא היה דרכם ברפואות יחלה האדם כפי אשר יהיה עליו עונש חטאו ויתרפא ברצון ה', אבל הם נהגו ברפואות והשם הניחם למקרי הטבעים: וזו היא כוננתם באמרם (שם) ורפא ירפא מכאן שנתנה רשות לרופא לרפאות, לא אמרו שנתנה רשות לחולה להתרפאות, אלא כיון שחלה החולה ובא להתרפאות כי נהג ברפואות והוא לא היה מעדת השם שחלקם בחיים, אין לרופא לאסור עצמו מרפואתו... אבל ברצות השם דרכי איש אין לו עסק ברופאים:</p>
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Rambam seems to take a different approach to Ramban. His words come in his commentary to the following Mishnah:

5. Mishnah, Pesachim 4:9 – King Chizkiyahu (Hezekiah) hid the Book of Remedies.

King Chizkiyahu did six things, three of which were approved and three of which were not... He hid the Book of Remedies and it was approved.	ששה דברים עשה חזקיה המלך על שלשה הודו לו ועל שלשה לא הודו לו... וגנו ספר רפואות והודו לו.
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6. Rambam, Commentary to Mishnah, Pesachim 4:9 – Taking medicine is no different than eating food: neither demonstrates a lack of faith. Rather, in both cases we thank G-d for providing what we need.

<p>It was explained to me that King Shlomo wrote this book, and when a person was sick, he would follow the instructions in this book and be cured. When Chizkiyahu saw that when people fell ill, they no longer relied on G-d, he hid this book away.</p> <p>Now, aside from this being a nonsensical explanation, it also attributes to Chizkiyahu and his ilk such foolishness the likes of which are only attributable to the lowest rungs of the masses. Following their silly and confused logic, if a person is hungry and he eats bread, is that a failure to rely on G-d? Fools! Just as I acknowledge and thank G-d when He gives me food to assuage my hunger and strengthen me to live and carry on, so too I thank Him when He provides me with medicine that heals me when I take it.</p>	<p>שמעתי וגם פירשו לי ששלמה חבר ספר רפואות שאם חלה אדם באיזו מחלה שהיא פנה אליו ועשה כמו שהוא אומר ומתרפא, וראה חזקיה שלא היו בני אדם בוטחים בה' במחלותיהם אלא על ספר הרפואות, עמד וגנזו.</p> <p>ומלבד אפסות דבר זה ומה שיש בו מן ההזיות, הנה ייחסו לחזקיה ולסיעתו שהודו לו סכלות שאין ליחס דוגמתה אלא לגרועים שבהמון. ולפי דמיונם המשובש והמטופש אם רעב אדם ופנה אל הלחם ואכלו שמתרפא מאותו הצער הגדול בלי ספק, האם נאמר שהסיר בטחונו מה', והוי שוטים יאמר להם, כי כמו שאני מודה לה' בעת האוכל שהמציא לי דבר להסיר רעבוני ולהחיותני ולקיימני, כך נודה לו על שהמציא רפואה המרפאה את מחלתי כששתמש בה.</p>
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As for why Chizkiyahu hid the Book of Remedies, Rambam explains that people began misusing its formulas to kill rather than heal.

Part B. A Divine Partnership

Rabbi Eliyahu E. Dessler explains that Ramban and Rambam are not really arguing with each other. Both would agree that there is an ideal way of life, and there is an actual way that people live. Ramban describes the ideal, Rambam the actual. Both would agree that people today need to seek medical treatment, but at the same time they must turn to G-d in prayer.

1. Rabbi Eliyahu E. Dessler, Michtav Me'Eliyahu, Vol. III, pp. 172 – Rambam and Ramban speak about different spiritual planes.

The opinions of Rambam and Ramban are not contradictory; rather, each one speaks about a different spiritual level.	ששיטות הרמב"ם והרמב"ן אינן חלוקות, אלא שכל אחד מדבר על מדרגה אחרת.
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<p>The highest level is when a person perceives that everything that happens to him is directly from G-d and not a result of any other cause. Such a person turns to G-d for all his needs for He is the source of everything.</p> <p>On such a level, a person who gets sick would go to a prophet to discern the spiritual root of his sickness and to ask what G-d expects of him in order to correct his vice. If such a person were to go to a doctor for medicinal healing – that would be considered turning away from G-d, for his actions would be seen as an attempt to bypass G-d's will and be healed without correcting the root cause of his illness, i.e. that he was lax or had perverted his service to G-d. To do that would certainly be a sin.</p> <p>Rambam would agree with all this. The proof is that even in regards to eating, which Rambam himself equated with healing and used to prove his point, we find spiritual levels that do not require food. An example would be Moshe when he went up Mount Sinai to receive the Torah, as it says, “neither did I eat bread nor drink water.” ...Thus, there is a spiritual level in which a person need not partake of the natural means of survival.</p> <p>On the lower spiritual level, a person perceives natural causes and therefore even G-d hides His ways from him and guides him in accordance with these natural forces, as Ramban says, “G-d lets them be governed by the forces of nature.” Even though it is still incumbent upon such a person to pray to G-d for recovery, he must seek medical treatment and then thank G-d when it works. Through this process he will come to recognize the ways of G-d and His kindness to him, and he will learn to better his ways. Ramban agrees with this...</p>	<p>המדרגה העליונה היא, שמבחין האדם בכל מקריו ובכל אשר סובב אותו את הנהגת השם יתברך הישירה, שאינה תלויה בסבות. והוא יפנה בכל אשר הוא צריך רק אל השי"ת, כי הוא המקור לכל.</p> <p>במדרגה זו, אם יחלה האדם, ילך אל הנביא לדרוש לסבה הרוחנית של מחלתו, לידע מה השי"ת שואל מעמו, כדי לתקן את אשר עיוות. אם ילך אדם זה אל הרופא להתרפא ברפואה טבעית – בזה פונה לבו מהשי"ת, שכן מעשהו מורה כאילו אפשר ח"ו לעקוף את רצון ה' ולהתרפא בלי לתקן את השורש הפנימי שגרם למחלה – את אשר חיסר ועיוות בעבודת ה'. אם כן בודאי חוטא הוא...</p> <p>ובכגון זה גם הרמב"ם מודה. והראיה, שהרי אפילו באכילה, שהשוה אותה הרמב"ם לרפואה, והוכיח מכאן כשיטתו, מצינו מדרגות בהן אין צורך באכילה, כמדרגת משה רבנו ע"ה בקבלת התורה, עליה נאמר: "לחם לא אכלתי ומים לא שתיתי" ... הרי שיש מדרגה בה אין צורך להשתמש בדרכי הטבע.</p> <p>במדרגה תחתונה מבחין האדם בסבות טבעיות, לכן אף השי"ת מסתיר את הנהגתו ממנו, ומנהיגו באמצעות סבות טבעיות, כדברי הרמב"ן: "וה' הניחם למקרה הטבעים". אדם זה, אף שבודאי מוטל עליו להתפלל אל השם יתברך לרפואתו, צריך להשתמש ברפואות טבעיות, ולהודות להשם יתברך על שהמציא לו רפואה לחליו, ומתוך זה להכיר את הנהגת השי"ת וחסדיו עמו, וללמוד להטיב את דרכיו. הרמב"ן גם הוא מודה בזה...</p>
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Rabbi Dessler goes on to say that a person must be honest with himself and recognize the true level of his own spiritual sensitivity. There is no use simply acting as if one is as holy as Moshe – expecting his physical body to be sustained by spirituality – when in fact that is not how he really

lives his life. Therefore, someone who refuses medical treatment and relies solely on G-d is most likely being irresponsible and negligent according to both Rambam and Ramban.

Even though we are not on the spiritual level described by Ramban where we could rely directly on G-d for our healing, nevertheless we must not lose sight of G-d's role in the healing process. We go to doctors, to be sure, but we must put our faith in G-d. Therefore, our prayers for healing must accompany our appointments with the doctor.

2. Rabbi Shlomo ben Aderet, Teshuvot HaRashba 1:413 – Trust in G-d that He will send healing through the doctor.

Someone who gets sick should not rely on a miracle to get better rather than asking a doctor or seeking whatever kind of treatment may help, whether natural or mystical. That is what it means when it says "he shall heal," that permission has been granted to doctors to heal, meaning that such is not inconsistent with the concept of Divine Providence...	ומי שהשיגו החולי אינו סומך על הנס שלא לשאול ברופאים ולהתעסק בדברים המועילים בין בדברים הטבעיים בין בסגולות. והוא אמרו ורפא ורפא ואמרו ז"ל מכאן שנתנה רשות לרופא לרפאות. ואמרם נתנה רשות לומר שאין זה הפך מה שהזהירה התורה בהשגחה...
It is permissible to put one's faith in another person (such as a doctor) as long as one does not remove G-d from his heart...But to trust in G-d that He will send salvation through such and such a person is permissible and is a mitzvah.	ומותר לבטוח באדם שהוא יסור לבו מן השם... אך לבטוח בשם ושיעשה לו תשועה ע"י האיש הפלוני מותר ומצוה.

3. Rabbi Yisroel Meir Kagan, Mishnah Berurah, Orach Chaim 230:6 – Trust that G-d will make the medicine work.

In all forms of treatment, one should not consider that any particular treatment will heal him but rather that G-d will. Therefore, by way of prayer one puts his trust in G-d and requests that the treatment heal him.	בכל מידי דרפואה יאמר זה ולא יחשוב שתהיה איזה דבר לו רפואה אלא ע"י הבורא ית"ש ולכן ע"י תפלה זו ישים בטחונו בו ויבקש ממנו שתהיה לו לרפואה:
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The proper path for people today is to seek treatment, but not to rely on it alone. We must pray that the treatment work and thank G-d when it does.

Part C. Even the Healthy

In this blessing we pray for G-d to heal the sick. If we ourselves are healthy, we can offer this prayer on behalf of someone we know who needs a speedy recovery. However, our Sages teach us that we should not take our own health for granted. The healthy also need to pray to G-d that He maintain their health for them.

1. Talmud Bavli, Shabbat 32a – The healthy should pray for health.

Rabbi Yitzchak bar Rav Yehuda said: Let one always pray for mercy not to fall sick; for he who falls sick is told, "Show your merits [why you	אמר רב יצחק בריה דרב יהודה: לעולם יבקש אדם רחמים שלא יחלה, שאם יחלה - אומרים לו: הבא זכות והפטר.
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deserve to be healed] and be acquitted” [i.e. it is easier to pray for continued good health than to ask to be healed, which requires special merit].	
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Part D. **כי תהילתנו אתה – For You are Our Praise**

What does praising G-d have to do with asking Him for health?

1. Rabbi Zev Leff, Shemoneh Esrei, pg. 157 – Getting sick helps us appreciate G-d.

In addition to being a supplication, this phrase can also be understood as a statement: G-d, I recognize that unless You heal me, I cannot be healed; unless You save me, I cannot be saved. This intention connects to the next phrase, “ <i>Ki tehillateinu Attah</i> - For You are our praise.” One purpose of illness is to give an incentive to recognize G-d’s presence and seek Him out, and thus to intensify our awareness of His greatness and be more capable to praise Him properly. Thus, my recognition that You alone, G-d, can heal and save achieves the purpose of Your being my object of praise and hence my deserving of being healed.

Part E. G-d’s Power to Heal

1. Rabbi Yitzchak Maltzin, Siach Yitzchak – G-d lacks none of the resources needed to heal us.

<i>G-d, King, the faithful and compassionate Healer</i> – The lack of a natural cure could be for any of the following reasons: The wound could be fatal since there is no natural cure or the only cure is expensive medicine from a far-off land, or the doctor might not be expert enough, or he could be so cruel as to not want to treat the patient.	<p>אל מלך רופא נאמן ורחמן, כי העדר רפואה הטבעית יתכן באחת מאלה: או שהמכה אנושה מאנה הרפא מצד הטבע או שצריכים לזה סמים יקרים ממדינות רחוקות, או שהרופא איננו מומחה באמת או שהוא אכזרי ואין רצונו לרפאות החולה מאכזריותו.</p>
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None of these reasons apply to G-d, for You are G-d , and You do not lack the power to heal any illness in the world; and You are King , and do not lack the power to get any expensive treatment from any part of the world; and You are a reliable Healer , the true expert; and You are compassionate , to be gentle, sympathetic, and benevolent.	<p>וכל אלה הסבות אינם אצל ה' כי אתה אל ולא נמנע מכחך לרפאות כל מחלה שבעולם, ואתה מלך ואין נמנע מכחך להשיג כל ענינים היקרים שהם בקצה תבל ואתה רופא נאמן המומחה האמיתי. ואתה רחמן ורחם ולרצוןך להחיות.</p>
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2. Rabbi Avraham Edelstein, Ner Le'Elef Booklet, Insights into the Weekday Siddur, pg. 139 – Include your sick together with the whole nation.

The Gemara relates that when one davens for another Jew's well-being, he should include them amongst the other ill people in the Jewish nation, for, as a result, this person will be included in the merits of the broader nation. This will increase his friend's chance of receiving a <i>refuah</i> (recovery). In addition, the Jewish people is all one body, and therefore, if anyone is sick (even someone who is a stranger to us), we should all feel a certain lack of wholeness.
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Many siddurim include an insertion for praying for specific individuals who need a refuah among everyone else requiring a complete healing in the Jewish nation.

Key Themes of רפואה – Healing.

- On the one hand, belief in an all-powerful G-d implies that we should not go to doctors but should rely entirely on our prayers for healing. If we are sick then G-d wants us that way; if He wanted us better, He would heal us Himself. However, the Torah allows us to seek medical treatment and does not view such treatment as contrary to G-d's plan.
- One reason for the necessity of doctors, says Ramban, is that we do not live in an ideal world where everyone trusts in G-d wholeheartedly enough to rely solely upon Him for healing. Since we have chosen to live according to the dictates of nature, G-d lets nature run its course with us as well.
- Rambam, however, sees no contradiction between faith and healing. Taking medicine for recovery is no different than eating food to survive. In either case we put in the effort and trust in G-d for the desired result.
- These two great Sages do not disagree with each other. Both would admit that ideally we should trust entirely in G-d but that practically most people do not function on that exalted spiritual level.
- Therefore, we go to doctors, but we must not rely on them completely. Every visit to the doctor should be accompanied by a prayer to G-d for the success of the prescribed treatment.
- The prayer for health is not only appropriate to say for a sick person; the healthy should say it as well in order not to take their own good health for granted.
- Getting sick and experiencing recovery helps us appreciate G-d and that is why we tell G-d in this berachah that He is "our praise." As the All-powerful G-d and King of the universe, His ability to heal knows no bounds. As a compassionate and reliable healer, He heals us gently with the greatest expertise imaginable.
- Many siddurim include an insertion to pray for specific individuals who need a refuah among everyone else requiring a complete healing in the Jewish nation.

Berachah 9. ברכת השנים – Year of Prosperity

בָּרַךְ עָלֵינוּ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ אֶת הַשָּׁנָה הַזֹּאת וְאֶת כָּל מִינֵי תְבוּאָתָהּ לְטוֹבָה. וְתֵן (בְּקִיץ - בְּרֶכֶה) (בַּחֹרֶף - טַל וּמָטָר לְבֶרֶכָה) עַל פְּנֵי הָאֲדָמָה וְשִׁבְעֵנוּ מִטוֹבָךְ. וּבָרַךְ שָׁנֵינוּ כְּשָׁנִים הַטּוֹבוֹת. בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה מְבָרֵךְ הַשָּׁנִים.

Bless on our behalf— O L-rd, our G-d – this year and all its kinds of crops for the best, and give (in the summer: a blessing) (in the winter: dew and rain for a blessing) on the face of the earth, and satisfy us from Your bounty, and bless our years like the best years. Blessed are You, G-d, Who blesses the years.

While in the second berachah of the Shemoneh Esrei we praised G-d for sending the life-giving force of rain, here we actually petition G-d to send it to us at the right time. We find divergent customs between the Land of Israel and outside the land as to when to start making this request.

Part A. The Key to Livelihood

As we mentioned in our commentary on the second berachah, Gevurot, livelihood is one the things to which only G-d holds the key.

1. Talmud Bavli, Taanit 2a-b – G-d holds the keys to livelihood.

Rabbi Yochanan said: G-d holds three keys that He does not give agency to anyone else. These are the key to rain, the key to life, and the key to Resurrection of the Dead... In the West (Israel), they said: also the key to livelihood, as the verse states, “You open Your hand (and satisfy the desire of every living thing)” [Tehillim/Psalms 145:16]. And why didn’t Rabbi Yochanan count livelihood as the fourth key? He would say to you that livelihood was already included in rain.	אמר רבי יוחנן: שלשה מפתחות בידו של הקדוש ברוך הוא שלא נמסרו ביד שליח, ואלו הן: מפתח של גשמים, מפתח של חיה, ומפתח של תחיית המתים. ... במערבא אמרי: אף מפתח של פרנסה, דכתיב (תהלים קמה) פותח את ידך וגו'. ורבי יוחנן מאי טעמא לא קא חשיב להא? אמר לך: גשמים היינו פרנסה.
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We tend to think that our career choices and the effort we put into our work will determine the standard of our livelihood. Judaism teaches that such is not the case. We only succeed where G-d wants us to.

2. Talmud Bavli, Kiddushin 82a with Commentary of Tosafot – Profession is no guarantee of wealth.

One should always try to teach his child a clean and easy profession and pray to the One to whom all wealth and possessions belong, for there is no profession that does not have in it those who are poor and those who are rich. Poverty does not come from the profession, and neither does wealth. Rather everything depends upon one’s spiritual merits [meaning his <i>mazal</i> – fate, for “length of life, number of children, and	לעולם ילמד אדם את בנו אומנות נקיה וקלה, ויתפלל למי שהעושר והנכסים שלו, שאין אומנות שאין בה עניות ועשירות, שלא עניות מן האומנות ולא עשירות מן האומנות, אלא הכל לפי זכותו. [פירוש לפי מזלו דבני וחיי ומזוני לאו בזכותא תליא מילתא אלא במזלא תליא מילתא (מ"ק כח.). – תוספות]
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the extent of one's sustenance do not depend on one's merit, but on one's mazal" (Moed Katan 28a)].	
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Wealth affects different people in different ways, and therefore cannot be granted on the basis of merit alone. For this reason, the key to wealth remains in G-d's hand alone, and even the righteous have no promise of livelihood.

3. Talmud Bavli, Niddah 16b – A person's economic fortunes are largely determined from the time of conception.

Rav Chanina bar Pappa taught: The angel appointed over pregnancy...takes the drop (of sperm) and brings it before G-d and says: "Master of the World, what will become of this drop? Will he be...rich or poor?"	דריש ר' חנינא בר פפא אותו מלאך הממונה על ההריון ... ונוטל טפה ומעמידה לפני הקדוש ברוך הוא ואומר לפניו רבונו של עולם טפה זו מה תהא עליה ... עשיר או עני.
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Divine Providence determines each person's economic fortune and how it will fit it into G-d's overall plan. The degree of providence required to set each individual in his economic station is as great as that required to produce a miracle.

4. Talmud Bavli, Pesachim 118a with commentary of Rashbam – Livelihood requires a miracle.

A person's livelihood is as difficult (for G-d) as the splitting the Sea.	קשין מזונותיו של אדם כקריעת ים סוף.
As the splitting of the Sea – That is, the incredible miracle that G-d does for people by providing their livelihood is comparable to when He split the Sea before the Jewish people.	כקריעת ים סוף: כלומר נס גדול עושה לו הקדוש ברוך הוא למי שנותן לו מזונות כאשר עשה לישראל שקרע להם ים סוף:

The chain of events governing a person's economic fortunes is largely determined from the time of his conception. That is the meaning of mazal, the specific constellation of circumstances a person will face in life. Besides this, however, each person is constantly judged, and his financial fortunes are determined, over periods of time. To this end, G-d calculates on Rosh HaShanah what a person's livelihood will be for the upcoming year.

5. Talmud Bavli, Beitzah 16a – One's livelihood is determined by the judgment of Rosh HaShanah.

The entire sustenance of man [for the year] is fixed for him between Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur.	כל מזונותיו של אדם קצובים לו מראש השנה ועד יום הכפורים.
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At the beginning of each year, G-d determines a person's livelihood for the year. This is part of what it means that Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur are days of judgment, for it is at this time that G-d

decides how to allocate funds for the upcoming year. If that's the case, why do we pray every day for sustenance? If it has already been determined, why pray for it?

The answer is that even though the amount we earn cannot change, whether our income will be a blessing for us or not still depends on how we act throughout the year.

6. Talmud Bavli, Rosh HaShanah 17b – G-d will match the outcome of our judgment on Rosh HaShanah to our conduct during the course of the year.

<p>“The eyes of the L-rd, Your G-d are upon [the Land of Israel] (from the beginning of the year until the end)” (Devarim 11:12). Sometimes for the better, and sometimes for the worse.</p> <p>What is an example of this for the better? If the Jewish people were completely wicked on Rosh HaShanah and were decreed to have a small amount of rain, but in the end changed their ways – to give them more rain would be impossible as it had already been decreed. Rather, G-d makes that rain fall in the proper time in the places that need it, according to each place's particular need.</p> <p>What is an example of this for the worse? If the Jewish people were completely righteous on Rosh HaShanah and were decreed to have abundant rain, but in the end changed their ways – to give them less would be impossible for it had already been decreed. Rather, G-d makes that rain fall unseasonably and in places that do not need it.</p>	<p>עיני ה' אלהיך בה - עתים לטובה עתים לרעה.</p> <p>עתים לטובה כיצד? הרי שהיו ישראל רשעים גמורין בראש השנה, ופסקו להם גשמים מועטים, לסוף חזרו בהן. להוסיף עליהן - אי אפשר, שכבר נגזרה גזרה. אלא הקדוש ברוך הוא מורידן בזמן על הארץ הצריכה להן, הכל לפי הארץ.</p> <p>עתים לרעה כיצד? הרי שהיו ישראל צדיקים גמורין בראש השנה, ופסקו עליהן גשמים מרובין. לסוף חזרו בהן, לפחות מהן - אי אפשר, שכבר נגזרה גזרה. אלא הקדוש ברוך הוא מורידן שלא בזמן על הארץ שאינה צריכה להן.</p>
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G-d makes only a basic calculation on Rosh HaShanah as to what a person's livelihood will be for the coming year. However, this can be altered based on actual daily performance and our prayers, particularly this berachah of the Shemoneh Esrei.

Since G-d runs the world, what difference does it make if we pray? It seems strange to ask G-d for things that He already knows we want. Furthermore, if He hasn't given us what we want yet, He must have a good reason; can prayer really change G-d's mind?

While we cannot change G-d with our prayer, we can change ourselves. This is one way in which prayer can change our lives.

7. Rabbi Yosef Albo, Sefer Ikarim (translated by Isaac Husik), from Rabbi J. David Bleich, Ed., With Perfect Faith, pp. 267-269 – If G-d has already decreed that one will receive a certain benefit, why should he pray? Alternatively, if G-d has not decreed that this should happen, can prayer change His plan?

<p>Either G-d has ordered that a person shall receive a certain benefit or He has not. If He has, there is no need for prayer; and if He has not, how can prayer change G-d's will so that He will decide to benefit the person when He had not wanted to originally? For G-d does not change from a state of willing to a state of not willing, or vice versa. For this reason, they say that the worthiness of an action does not help a person receive any benefit from G-d. And similarly, they say that prayer does not help one to receive a benefit or to be saved from something bad which has been decreed against him.</p> <p>But this approach is not true, for the influences from above come down upon the recipient when he is on a certain spiritual level and state of preparation to receive them. And if a person does not prepare himself, he withholds this good from himself. By way of allegory, if it has been determined from on High that a person's crops shall prosper in a given year, and he neglects to plow or sow his land that year, then G-d may bring the most abundant rain upon the land but his crops will not prosper, seeing that he has not plowed or sowed. He withheld the good from himself because he did not prepare himself to receive it... Likewise, when a certain evil is ordered upon someone, it was ordered when he was on a certain level of wickedness, or he had a particular quality [that did not allow him to receive a particular form of goodness].</p> <p>As for the objection that the Divine Will cannot be changed by prayer, the answer is that it is the Divine Will in the first place that the decree should be realized if the person in question continues in the same state, and that the decree should be changed if the person's state changes.</p>	<p>אם נגזר מהשם טוב מה על איש או לא נגזר. ואם נגזר אין צריך תפלה, ואם לא נגזר איך תועיל התפלה לשנות רצון השם לנגזר עליו טוב אחר שלא נגזר, שלא ישתנה השם מן הרצון אל לא רצון, ולא מלא רצון אל רצון, ובעבור זה יאמרו שלא יועיל כשרון המעשה אל שיגיע לאדם מהשם בעבורו טוב מה, וכן שאמרו שלא תועיל התפלה להשיג טוב מה או להנצל מרע שנגזר עליו.</p> <p>וזה הדעת איננו נכון, שהשפעות העליונות יושפעו על המקבל בהיותו במדרגה ידועה והכנה ידועה לקבלם, ואם לא יכין האדם עצמו לקבל השפע ההוא הנה הוא המונע הטוב מעצמו, שאם נגזר על איש מה על דרך משל שיצליחו תבואותיו בשנה פלונית והוא לא יחרוש ולא יזרע בשנה ההיא אף אם ימטיר השם מטרות עזו על פני תבל ארצו לא תצליחנה תבואותיו אחר שלא חרש וזרע והוא המונע מעצמו הטוב ההוא שלא הכין עצמו לקבלו... וכן כשנגזר עליו רע מה הנה הוא נגזר בהיותו במדרגה ידועה מהרוע או בהכנה ידועה...</p> <p>ואין להקשות ולומר איך ישתנה רצון השם יתברך על ידי התפלה, שכך היה רצון השם מתחלה שתתקיים הגזירה בהיותו באותה מדרגה ואותה הכנה, ואם תשתנה ההכנה תשתנה הגזירה.</p>
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Changing ourselves changes the world. When we prepare ourselves for G-d's blessing, we will receive the goodness He wishes upon us.

Part B. Kosher Money

We are not just asking to have what we need. We want it to be from “G-d’s bounty.” Part of what this means is that we want to have what we need in a kosher way as opposed to ill-gotten gain.

1. Rabbi Yonatan Eibeschitz, Ya’arot Devash, Vol. I, pg. 10 – Sustenance acquired in a kosher way nourishes the soul.

It is fitting that at least during the morning prayers a person should wish that G-d provide his daily sustenance in a permissible rather than forbidden manner, for if there is the slightest trace of the forbidden in his food it will sully his whole body and not provide sustenance for the soul. But if the food is [acquired] completely in a permissible way, then it does provide sustenance to the soul for it raises all the sparks of holiness in the food, as it is written, “it is not by bread alone that man lives, but by all that issues from G-d’s mouth.” Therefore, a person should pray with the utmost intention that his food be from a clean and pure source and not, G-d forbid, from an unclean one.	ראוי בתפלת שחרית עכ"פ לשום אל לבו לה' שיטריף לו לחם חקו בהיתר ולא באיסור כי אם יש נדנוד איסור במזון מטמא כל גופו ואין בו מזון לנשמה אבל אם המזון כולו בהיתר יש בו מזון לנשמה כי מעלה כל ניצוצות שיש במאכל כדכתיב כי לא על הלחם לבדו יחיה האדם כי על כל מוצא פי ה', ולכן יתפלל אדם מאוד בכוונה שיהי' המזון מסטרא דדכיא וטהרה ולא חס ושלום מסטרא דמסאנא.
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Kosher in this regard is not just about the ingredients; our food must be acquired with money that we procure in ways that conform to the Torah’s laws, i.e. “all that issues from G-d’s mouth.” Included in this prayer is not only our personal means of acquisition but also that of the world. We want G-d to bless everyone with real wealth, not fake and fleeting prosperity.

2. Rabbi Avrohom Chaim Feuer, Shemoneh Esrei, pg. 142 – We ask that G-d save us from unscrupulous market manipulators.

We request that G-d grant us true prosperity, not false prosperity. Sharp upturns in the business cycle may inflate property values, launch corporate takeovers, and cause stock prices to skyrocket. Unscrupulous speculators may take advantage of this situation to drive up optimism to unrealistic levels. Suddenly, everyone is investing in stocks, junk bonds, and real estate, and it seems as if instant wealth is within anyone's reach. Then the bubble bursts and countless investors and innocent bystanders are the victims of yet another recession. To help prevent this scenario, we beseech G-d to protect us from the false prosperity created by selfish manipulators. We desire lasting prosperity which can only come as a gift from G-d.
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Part C. Avoiding the Pitfalls of Prosperity

Aside from avoiding non-kosher sources of money, we also need to recognize the pitfalls of prosperity itself, such as **arrogance**, **worry**, and **greed**.

- **Arrogance**

1. Devarim 8:11-17 – The Torah warns us not to let our prosperity go to our heads.

Be careful that you not forget G-d your L-rd, not keeping His commandments, decrees and laws, which I am prescribing to you today. You may then eat and be satisfied, building fine houses and living in them. Your herds and flocks may increase, and you may amass much silver and gold – everything you own may increase. But your heart may then grow haughty, and you may forget G-d your L-rd, the One Who brought you out of the slave house that was Egypt... [When you later have prosperity, be careful that you not] say to yourself, "It was my own strength and personal power that brought me all this prosperity."	השמר לך פן תשכח את יקוק אלהיך לבלתי שמר מצותיו ומשפטיו וחקתיו אשר אנכי מצוך היום: פן תאכל ושבעת ובתים טובים תבנה וישבת: ובקרך וצאנך ירבין וכסף וזהב ירבה לך וכל אשר לך ירבה: ורם ללבבך ושכחת את יקוק אלהיך המוציאך מארץ מצרים מבית עבדים ואמרת בלבבך כחי ועצם ידי עשה לי את החיל הזה:
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- **Worry**

2. Pirkei Avot 2:7 – Increasing our possessions can increase our anxiety.

One who increases possessions, increases worry.	מרבה נכסים מרבה דאגה.
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3. Kohelet (Ecclesiastes) 5:11 – Riches bring their own worries.

The sleep of the laborer is sweet, whether he eats little or much, but the satiety of the rich does not allow him to sleep.	מתוקה שנת העבד אם מעט ואם הרבה יאכל והשבע לעשיר איננו מניח לו לישון.
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- **Greed**

4. Ibid., 5:9 – The pursuit of money is insatiable.

Whoever loves money will not be sated with money...	אהב כסף לא ישבע כסף...
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5. Kohelet Rabbah 1:13 – If we desire money too much, then we will never be satisfied.

Rabbi Yudan said in the name of Rabbi Aibu: Nobody departs from the world with half his desire gratified. If one has a hundred he wants to turn them into two hundred, and if he has two hundred he wants to turn them into four hundred.	אמר ר' יודן בשם ר' איבו אין אדם יוצא מן העולם וחצי תאותו בידו אלא אן אית ליה מאה בעי למעבד יתהון תרתין מאון, ואן אית ליה תרתין מאון בעי למעבד יתהון ארבעה מאה.
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Part D. Getting Satisfaction

As we saw above, sustenance coming specifically from G-d's bounty nourishes the soul. Hence we are not necessarily praying for a lot of sustenance, for abundance is not the be all and end all; we are also praying to be satisfied by what G-d sends us. In fact, having very little is not a problem in and of itself. If the little we have satisfies us, then that too is a blessing. In fact, G-d's blessing of sustenance is viewed in Jewish sources as less a blessing for abundance than a supplication for satisfaction.

1. Vayikra 26:5 with Commentary of Rashi (Citing Torat Kohanim 26:6) – G-d's blessing is not in the abundance but in the satisfaction it provides.

...you will eat your food to satiety...	ואכלתם לחמכם לשבע,
One will eat only a little [food], but it will become blessed in his innards.	אוכל קמעה והוא מתברך במעיו.

2. Rabbi Avrohom Chaim Feuer, Shemoneh Esrei, pg. 143 – Pray for satisfaction every day.

The Baal Shem Tov teaches that every day G-d decides how much pleasure and satisfaction each person will derive from the possessions that he already has, and so we must constantly pray for *daily* satisfaction.

3. Rabbi Shimon Schwab, On Prayer, pg. 446 – Being satisfied helps to cure human greed.

Our Sages tell us (see Sanhedrin 97a and Sotah 49b) that before the coming of Mashiach (Messiah) there will be such greed that despite the fact that the grape crop will be abundant, the wine producers will demand high prices for it; they would rather waste it than sell it cheaply. People will have huge appetites for riches which can never be satiated.

Despite the fact that the world overproduces food, millions of people are still starving. If it would not be for greed, all the food in the world would be properly distributed among the population, and everybody would have enough to eat. However, since the "goodness of G-d" is missing, people are never satisfied; they can never get enough. And therefore we ask Hashem *Satiate us with Your goodness*. Give us enough food and money and possessions for our needs, and give us that feeling of being satisfied, which will obviate our greed and lust for more and more – a desire that can never be satisfied.

Key Themes of ברכת השנים – Year of Prosperity.

- We like to think that our salaries are for the most part our own doing. We decide what job to take and what to do with our money, but profession is no guarantee for wealth.
- The chain of events determining our livelihood starts as early as the time of conception. Annual income is also predetermined based on the judgment of Rosh HaShanah at the beginning of each year.
- Although our livelihood is largely out of our hands, we can affect it through personal growth and prayer.

- Part of this prayer is asking that everything we earn should be with blessing from “G-d’s bounty.” We ask to avoid the dangerous pitfalls that prosperity itself can bring: unscrupulous behavior sometimes involved in money-making, the arrogance bred by success, the worry that comes with acquisition, greed fed by having more and more of what we want.
- What we really want, what we pray for, is nothing external to ourselves but rather the internal satisfaction with everything that G-d has graciously granted us.

Berachah 10. קיבוץ גלויות (*Kibbutz Galuyot*) – Ingathering of the Exiles

תִּקַּע בְּשׁוֹפָר גָּדוֹל לְחֵירוּתֵנוּ. וְיֵשָׂא גַם לְקַבֵּץ גְּלוּיֹתֵינוּ. וְקַבְּצֵנוּ יַחַד מֵאֶרֶצַּע כְּנָפּוֹת הָאָרֶץ. בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה
מְקַבֵּץ נִדְחֵי עַמּוֹ יִשְׂרָאֵל:

Sound the great shofar for our freedom, raise the banner to gather our exiles and gather us together from the four corners of the earth. Blessed are you, G-d, Who gathers in the dispersed of His people Israel.

We already prayed for redemption in the seventh berachah, so why are we talking about it again now? The answer is that there are significant differences between what we prayed for then and what we ask for now.

1. Rabbi Nosson Sherman, *The Siddur*, pg. 62 – The differences between this berachah and the earlier one of *Redeemer of Israel*.

This prayer for freedom and redemption is unlike the earlier one *Redeemer of Israel* in three ways. (1) The earlier blessing refers to G-d's *daily* help in all sorts of crises and suffering; this one refers to the *future* redemption from exile; (2) the earlier blessing refers only to *physical* salvation, while this one is a plea for *spiritual* deliverance; (3) this one specifies not only freedom from oppression, but the ingathering of all exiles to *Eretz Yisrael*.

Part A. The Ingathering of the Exiles

The Torah predicts that the Jewish people will be sent into exile as a consequence of not living up to our covenant with G-d. But it also promises that eventually we will be brought back to our land. This “ingathering of the exiles” and this return to the land is seen as part of the process of national redemption that will usher in the Messianic era.

The first reference to the ingathering of exiles is mentioned in the Torah itself. Later in Jewish history, when exile became not just a prophecy but a reality, the ingathering became a major theme of the prophets, in particular Yirmiyahu (Jeremiah), Yeshayahu (Isaiah), and Yechezkel (Ezekiel). Many of these prophecies refer to the ultimate redemption of the Jewish people in the time of the Mashiach. Although in recent times we see many Jews moving to the Land of Israel after the Holocaust and the founding of the State of Israel, *this* prayer refers to the final return of all the Jewish people to the Land of Israel that will accompany the Messianic era.

1. Devarim 30:3-5 – G-d promises to return the exiled Jews to their land.

G-d will then bring back your remnants and have mercy on you. G-d your L-rd will once again gather you from among all the nations where He scattered you. Even if you are dispersed to the ends of the heavens, G-d your L-rd will gather you up from there and He will take you back. G-d your L-rd will then bring you to the land that your ancestors occupied, and you too will occupy it. G-d will be good to you and make you flourish even more than your ancestors.

ושב יקוק אלהיך את שבותך ורחמך ושב וקבצך מכל העמים אשר הפיצך יקוק אלהיך שמה: אם יהיה נדחק בקצה השמים משם יקבצך יקוק אלהיך ומשם יקחד: והביאך יקוק אלהיך אל הארץ אשר ירשו אבותיך וירשתה והיטבך והרבך מאבתיך:

2. Yechezkel 37:21 – The prophet speaks of Israel's return to the Land.

And say to them, "So says the L-rd G-d: Behold I will take the Children of Israel from among the nations where they have gone, and I will gather them from every side, and I will bring them to their land."	ודבר אליהם כה אמר אדני יקוק הנה אני לקח את בני ישראל מבין הגוים אשר הלכו שם וקבצתי אתם מסביב והבאתי אותם אל אדמתם:
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3. Yirmiyahu 23:7-8 – Another prophecy of return.

Therefore, behold days are coming, says the L-rd, when they shall no longer say, "As lives the L-rd, Who brought up the Children of Israel from the land of Egypt," But rather, "As lives the L-rd, Who brought up and Who brought the seed of the House of Israel from the northern land and from all the lands where I have driven them, and they shall dwell in their land."	לכן הנה ימים באים נאם יקוק ולא יאמרו עוד חי יקוק אשר העלה את בני ישראל מארץ מצרים: כי אם חי יקוק אשר העלה ואשר הביא את זרע בית ישראל מארץ צפונה ומכל הארצות אשר הדחתים שם וישבו על אדמתם:
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4. Rambam, Hilchot Melachim (The Laws of Kings) 11:1,4 – Gathering the dispersed Jews is one of the functions of the Mashiach.

In the future, the Messianic king will arise and renew the Davidic dynasty, restoring it to its initial sovereignty. He will build the Temple and gather the dispersed of Israel...	המלך המשיח עתיד לעמוד ולהחזיר מלכות דוד ליושנה לממשלה הראשונה, ובונה המקדש ומקבץ נדחי ישראל...
If a king will arise from the House of David who, like David, his ancestor, diligently studies the Torah and observes its mitzvot as prescribed by the Written Law and the Oral Law, and [this king] will compel all of Israel to walk in (the way of the Torah) and rectify the breaches in its observance, and fight the wars of G-d, we may, with assurance, consider him Mashiach.	ואם יעמוד מלך מבית דוד הוגה בתורה ועוסק במצוות כדוד אביו, כפי תורה שבכתב ושבעל פה, ויכוף כל ישראל לילך בה ולחזק בדקה, וילחם מלחמות ה', הרי זה בחזקת שהוא משיח,
If he succeeds in the above, builds the Temple in its place, and gathers the dispersed of Israel, he is definitely the Mashiach.	אם עשה והצליח ונצח כל האומות שסביביו ובנה מקדש במקומו וקבץ נדחי ישראל הרי זה משיח בודאי.

Part B. Beacon of Freedom

1. Yeshayahu 27:13 – The final Redemption will be initiated with a great shofar blast.

And it shall come to pass on that day that a great shofar shall be sounded, and those lost in the land of Assyria and those exiled in the land of Mitzrayim shall come and they shall prostrate themselves before the L-rd on the holy mount in Jerusalem.	והיה ביום ההוא יתקע בשופר גדול ובאו האבדים בארץ אשור והנדחים בארץ מצרים והשתחוו ליקוק בהר הקדש בירושלם:
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The Midrash understands the words of Yeshayahu literally, that the coming of the Mashiach will be heralded by the blast of an actual shofar, just as other events in Jewish history were accompanied by the sound of this instrument.

2. Tanna d'Bei Eliyahu Zuta 22:8 – A shofar will herald the coming of the Mashiach and the ingathering of the exiles.

Rabbi Yehoshua ben Korcha says, “The shofar was only created for the benefit of the Jewish people, for [with the blowing of] the shofar, the Torah was given to them... and through [the blowing of] the shofar, the walls of Jericho collapsed... and in the future, the Holy One, Blessed be He, will sound the shofar at the time when the Son of David, our righteous one, will be revealed... and in the future, the Holy One, Blessed be He, will sound the shofar at the time of the ingathering of the exiles...”	רבי יהושע בן קרחה אומר לא נברא שופר אלא לטובה לישראל שבשופר נתנה התורה לישראל... ובשופר נפלה חומת יריחו... ובשופר עתיד הקב"ה לתקוע בעת שיתגלה בן דוד צדקנו... ובשופר עתיד הקב"ה לתקוע בשעה שמכנס גליות ישראל למקומן...
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The Biblical commentator Rabbi David Kimchi (Radak) understands the sound of the shofar in a metaphorical sense. People will gather together *as if* they had all been called by a shofar.

3. Commentary of Radak to Yeshayahu 27:13 – Everyone will hear the news of the redemption.

People will gather together as if there had been a great shofar sounded throughout the world, as it is also said, “The L-rd, G-d, will blow a shofar” – they will come from every corner (of the world) as if they were called by a shofar.	כך יתקבצו כאלו היה נתקע בשופר גדול להשמיע הקול בכל העולם כמו שאמר גם כן וה' אלהים בשופר יתקע כך יבאו מכל פאה כאלו תקעו להם בשופר.
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This berachah speaks about freedom because freedom is an obvious precondition to the ingathering of the exiles. This fact is easily recognizable in terms of political freedom, as the twentieth century taught us with the immigration restrictions of the British Mandate and the emigration constraints of the Soviet Union. However, freedom is to be understood in a spiritual sense as well: We need the personal integrity and freedom of thought to follow a path to truth.

4. Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, The Jewish Year, pp. 76-77 – Freedom from confinement is only a neutral state. But to allow one's Divine Image to shine forth and to take the next step, one has to acknowledge G-d as the source of that freedom.

Freedom, by which we mean deliverance from burdens and the breaking of chains, is only a negative good. This freedom is merely a state in which the impediment standing in the way of fulfillment of the human vocation has been removed. It is merely a state in which room has been made for the Divine likeness to shine forth in man.	
If this vocation is to be fulfilled, if this likeness is to be realized, then the person who has become liberated and has been freed from his burdens must acknowledge Him to Whom he owed this liberation from his burdens and this freedom. The freed, unburdened person must accept his freedom from burdens and his liberty as a gift from G-d. He must recognize in G-d the <i>source</i> of his freedom, and must feel himself eternally bound to G-d and in service to Him precisely <i>because</i> of his	

freedom.

A fundamental concept in Judaism is that a person's freedom is determined solely by one's ability to make free-willed moral choices. Judaism understands that a person is composed of a *yetzer hatov*, which is the inclination to act positively, productively, and build oneself as a refined human being, and a *yetzer hara*, which is the inclination to act negatively and unproductively. The goal of life is to choose to act in accordance with one's yetzer hatov, and minimize the control of the yetzer hara over one's actions.

5. Talmud Bavli, Berachot 17a – There are two spiritual impediments to following G-d.

When R. Alexandri concluded his prayer, he used to add the following: Master of the Universe, it is known full well to You that our will is to perform Your will, and what prevents us? The yeast in the dough (a euphemism for the evil inclination in our hearts – Rashi) and the subjection to the foreign powers. May it be Your will to deliver us from their hand, so that we may return to perform the statutes of Your will with a perfect heart!

ורבי אלכסנדר בתי דמצלי אמר הכי: רבון העולמים, גלוי וידוע לפניך שרצוננו לעשות רצונך, ומי מעכב? שאור שבעיסה (יצר הרע שבלבנו, המחמיצנו – רש"י) ושעבוד מלכיות; יהי רצון מלפניך שתצילנו מידם, ונשוב לעשות חוקי רצונך בלבב שלם.

Our own evil inclinations as well as our subjugation to the dominant cultures of the lands in which we have lived keep us from fulfilling G-d's will. The personal strength needed to achieve freedom from these spiritual impediments will be facilitated by the Mashiach as he leads the Jewish people in the observance of the Torah, as Rambam stated above.

Part C. The Sound of Perfection

The shofar is used as a symbol of freedom. It also the symbol of *tikun olam*, the ultimate rectification of the world by the triumph of good over evil. That is why the Torah was given with the sound of the shofar and the Mashiach (Messiah) will be heralded by its sound.

1. Shemot 19:16, 19 – The Revelation at Mount Sinai was accompanied by the sound of the shofar.

The third day arrived. There was thunder and lightning in the morning, with a heavy cloud on the mountain, and an extremely loud blast of a shofar. The people in the camp trembled.

There was the sound of a shofar, increasing in volume to a great degree. Moshe (Moses) spoke, and G-d replied with a Voice.

ויהי ביום השלישי בהית הבקר ויהי קלת וברקים וענן כבד על ההר וקל שפר חזק מאד ויחרד כל העם אשר במחנה:

ויהי קול השופר הולך וחזק מאד משה ידבר והאלהים יענו בקול:

2. Ramchal, Ma'amar HaChochmah (An Essay on Wisdom) – The shofar initiated the process of perfecting the world when the Torah was given; it will again be present when that process comes to its completion.

<p>The first major step toward the perfection of the world was accompanied by a shofar blowing, when the Torah was given at Mount Sinai, as it says, “The sound of the shofar was increasing in volume.”</p> <p>[And it will accompany] the final completion of the world in the future, when good will completely triumph over evil, as it is written [in the prophecy describing the coming of Mashiach], “He will blow a great shofar blast...”</p> <p>We are commanded to blow the shofar on Rosh HaShanah to reinforce the perfection that began at the giving of the Torah, and to prepare for what will be done in the future.</p>	<p>החיזוק הא' שנעשה לטוב נעשה על ידי השופר דמתן תורה והוא ענין ויהי קול השופר וכו',</p> <p>והשלמת התיקון לעתיד לבא שהטוב ינצח נצחון גמור, גם הוא יהיה על ידי השופר והוא ענין יתקע בשופר גדול...</p> <p>ואולם נצטוינו לתקוע בשופר בראש השנה לחזק התיקון העשוי כבר במתן תורה ולהזמין העתיד ליעשות לעתיד לבא.</p>
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Part D. Raise the Banner

Why does the berachah talk of two different symbols of freedom: one, the sound of the shofar and the other, the raising of a banner?

One answer to this question is that there are two different ways of relating to the ingathering of the exiles. When the time comes, some Jews will go to Israel right away, while others will need more convincing to give up their comfortable footing in lands outside Israel.

1. Rabbi Meir Simcha of Dvinsk (Daugavpils), Meshech Chochmah to Devarim 30:3 – Some Jews will strive to return while others will be comfortable in exile.

<p><i>G-d will then bring back your remnants and have mercy on you. G-d your L-rd will once again gather you from among all the nations where He scattered you.</i></p> <p>Those captive Jews who pine for the Land of Israel and want to escape from other lands as if from prison, they will return first. [And when it says,] “...and have mercy on you and once again gather you from among all the nations, etc.” – this refers to the Jews that found it pleasant in the foreign lands and have lost the desire to return to the Land. They too will be gathered and returned after (the first wave of return).</p>	<p>ושב יקוק אלהיך את שבותך ורחמך ושב וקבצך מכל העמים אשר הפיצך יקוק אלהיך שמה:</p> <p>ישראל אשר המה בשבי שמשותקים אל ארץ ישראל ורוצים לברוח מחוצה לארץ כמבור השבי המה ישיב מקודם ורחמך ושב וקבצך מכל העמים כו' המה הישראלים אשר מצאו קורת רוח בארץ נכריה ובטל מהם התשוקה לארץ הצבי גם הם יקבצם השם וישיבם אחרי זה.</p>
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Based on this source, Rabbi Avrohom Chaim Feuer suggests that there are two types of people being referred to in this berachah: those that respond to the sound of the shofar and those that need something more, a sign that it is time to return to the Land.

The word for banner here is *nes*, which in Hebrew also means “miracle.” It may be that this word is used in this berachah in order to imply that the ingathering of exiles will be accompanied by miracles.

2. Rabbi Chaim Elazar Shapiro, Divrei Chaim V'Shalom, pg. 63 – The final ingathering of the exiles will be miraculous.

We pray “Raise the nes to gather in our exiles” [asking] that the ingathering of the exiles only happen in a miraculous way, not by any natural way at all. This is the correct way to have faith in the final redemption.	אנו מתפללים ושא נס לקבץ גליותנו שקיבוץ גלויות תהיה רק בדרך נס מן השמים ולא בדרך הטבע כלל וכלל וזהו שלימות האמונה בגאולה שלימה.
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Key Themes of קיבוץ גלויות – Ingathering of the Exiles.

- In this berachah we pray for the national spiritual salvation of the Jewish people to take place in the future with the coming of the Mashiach.
- The Torah predicts both the exile and the return of the Jewish people to their land. Gathering the Jews back to Israel will be one of the functions of the Mashiach.
- The final redemption will be heralded by the sound of a shofar, the symbol of freedom. We will need not only political freedom to return to the Land, but the spiritual freedom to follow the dictates of the *yetzer tov*, the good inclination.
- The shofar is also a symbol of *tikun olam*, rectification of the world. The process of that rectification started with the sounding of the shofar at Mount Sinai when the Torah was given and will end with the shofar of the Mashiach.

Berachah 11. דין (Din) – Restoration of Justice

הַשִּׁיבָה שׁוֹפְטֵינוּ כְּבָרְאֲשׁוֹנָה וְיִוָּעֲצֵינוּ כְּבִתְחִלָּה. וְהַסֵּר מִמֶּנּוּ יָגוֹן וְאַנְחָה. וּמִלֶּךְ עָלֵינוּ אֲתָה יְהוָה לְבִדְדָךְ בְּחֶסֶד וּבְרַחֲמִים. וְצִדְקָנוּ בְּמִשְׁפָּט. בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה מֶלֶךְ אוֹהֵב צְדָקָה וּמִשְׁפָּט:

Restore our judges as in earliest times and our counselors as in the beginning; remove from us sorrow and groaning; and reign over us – You, G-d, alone – with kindness and compassion, and justify us through judgment. Blessed are You, G-d, the King Who loves righteousness and judgment.

Returning to the Land is not enough on its own; we also pray that the state established on that land be a just one, where the integrity and values of the Torah will reign with righteousness and justice.

1. Rabbi Chaim HaLevy Donin, To Pray as a Jew, pg. 91 – After praying for the return of the Jews, we pray for the return of Jewish law.

The return to the Land of Israel is to be followed by the realization of yet another Biblical prophecy: “I will restore your judges as at first” (Isaiah 1:26). The eleventh blessing, paraphrasing this verse, is a prayer for still another step toward full redemption.

Throughout most of history, Jews had little faith in the “justice” that was dispensed by courts in the lands where they lived. The restoration of their own courts with judges who would follow the teachings inherent in G-d's law makes possible the implementation of what had previously been only theoretical Hebrew civil and criminal law. This blessing means that not only the people, but also Torah law *is* being returned from its exile.

Part A. Paving the Way for Mashiach

The restoration of justice according to Torah law is one of the key elements of the Messianic era. Indeed, justice can help to hasten the redemption.

1. Yeshayahu 1:26-27 – The Messianic era will be defined by a return to justice.

And I will restore your judges as at first and your counselors as in the beginning; and afterwards you shall be called City of Righteousness, Faithful City. Zion shall be redeemed through justice and her penitents through righteousness.

ואשיבה שפטיך כבראשנה ויעציד כבתחלה אחרי כן יקרא
לך עיר הצדק קריה נאמנה: ציון במשפט תפדה ושביה
בצדקה:

2. Rambam, Commentary on Mishnah, Sanhedrin 1:3 – Our righteousness will pave the way for Mashiach.

I hold that the Sanhedrin (Jewish Supreme Court) will return before the Mashiach is revealed, and this will be one of the signs of his coming, as it says, “And I will restore your judges as at first and your counselors as in the beginning; and *afterwards* you shall be called City of Righteousness.” This most certainly will take place after G-d has prepared the hearts of man

ואני סבור שהסנהדרין תשוב לפני התגלות המשיח וזה
יהיה מסימניו אמר ואשיבה שופטיך כבראשנה ויעציד
כבתחלה ואחרי כן יקרא לך עיר הצדק, וזה יהיה בלי ספק
כאשר יכשיר ה' לבות בני אדם וירבו במעשה הטוב ותגדל
תשוקתם לה' ולתורתו ויתרבה ישרם לפני בוא המשיח
כמו שנתבאר בפסוקי המקרא.

and they have increased their good deeds and developed their desire for G-d and His Torah. Their righteousness will increase before the coming of the Mashiach as is clear from the verses of Scripture.	
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The ultimate level of righteousness will be ushered in by the Mashiach himself.

3. Rambam, Hilchot Melachim 11:1 – The Mashiach will restore justice.

In the future, the Messianic king will arise and renew the Davidic dynasty, restoring it to its original sovereignty. He will build the Temple and gather the dispersed of Israel. Then, in his days, the observance of all the statutes will return to their previous state...	המלך המשיח עתיד לעמוד ולהחזיר מלכות דוד ליושנה לממשלה הראשונה, ובונה המקדש ומקבץ נדחי ישראל, וחוזרין כל המשפטים בימיו כשהיו מקודם...
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4. Rabbi Avraham Edelstein, Ner Le'Elef Booklet, Insights into the Weekday Siddur, pg. 143 – The Sanhedrin will create peace in the world ushering in Mashiach.

By saying מלך אוהב צדקה ומשפט (the King Who loves righteousness and judgment) we express our faith in reward and punishment. We now pray for the return of the Sanhedrin, for through them the honor of G-d is reflected, His <i>Shechinah</i> (Presence) is brought into the world and all disputes are resolved. Hence Mashiach will only return after Eliyahu HaNavi restores the Sanhedrin, thereby creating peace in the world.	
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Part B. The Judges of Old

To be a member of the Sanhedrin one had to have a constellation of sterling qualities such as wisdom, integrity, and refined character.

1. Rambam, Hilchot Sanhedrin 2:7 – Torah scholars who served on the Sanhedrin (Supreme Court) were held to the highest moral standards.

Each [judge] had to possess these seven traits: wisdom, humility, fear of Heaven, contempt for money, a love of truth, love for all people and a good reputation.	צריך שיהא בכל אחד מהן שבעה דברים ואלו הן חכמה וענוה ויראה ושנאת ממון ואהבת האמת ואהבת הבריות להן ובעלי שם טוב.
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Note: “Contempt for money” as used here means that the judges had contempt for any influence of money in rendering their decisions, such as bribery or favoring the rich and powerful.

2. Sefer Chassidim – Judges had to be Torah scholars par excellence.

A Torah scholar who cannot answer questions on any Torah subject that he might be asked is not fit to serve on the Sanhedrin.	תלמיד חכם שאינו יודע להשיב בכל מקום שישאלוהו אינו ראוי לישב בסנהדרין.
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3. Yoma 72b – A Torah scholar must possess genuinely exemplary character traits.

Any Torah scholar whose inner character does not match his external behavior is not a genuine	כל תלמיד חכם שאין תוכו כבחו - אינו תלמיד חכם.
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Part C. Tzedek and Tzedakah

In this berachah we ask G-d to **צדקינו במשפט**, *justify us through judgment*, and we call G-d **מלך אוהב צדקה**, *the King Who loves righteousness and judgment*. To what do these terms refer? Many of us are familiar with the term **צדקה** as charity, but that does not seem to be appropriate here. We're not asking G-d for charity. So what are we asking for?

Rambam in *Moreh Nevuchim* (cited below) explains that the root of the word tzedakah is *tzedek* which means justice, or righteous conduct. Tzedek connotes doing what ought to be done. We tend to think of tzedakah as charity, something nice and good that goes beyond the letter of the law. In reality, when a poor person needs help, it is an absolute obligation incumbent upon every Jew. Tzedakah is not just a “nice thing” to do; it's the “right thing” to do.

1. Yaakov ben Asher, Tur, Yoreh Deah 247 – It is G-d's will that we distribute His money to the poor.

Never allow your mind to entertain the perverse thought, “I can't afford to give charity to others, for it will diminish what I have for myself!” Because one must never forget that his money does not belong to him in the first place – it all belongs to G-d, Who has temporarily deposited His money with you to handle it according to His wishes. And it is G-d's will that you distribute of it to the poor. Indeed, the most precious part of your wealth is what you give to the poor, as it says (Isaiah 58:8): “And your charity shall go before you [to your eternal reward].”	ואל יעלה בלבו עצה לומר איך אחסר ממוני ליתנו לעניים כי יש לו לדעת שאין הממון שלו אלא פקדון לעשות בו רצון המפקיד וזה רצונו שיחלק לעניים ממנו וזהו החלק הטוב שיהיה לו ממנו כדכתיב והלך לפניך צדקך.
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2. Rabbi Mordechai Becher, Gateway to Judaism, p. 357 – Tzedakah is rooted in the concept of *tzedek* – justice and righteousness.

The Hebrew word tzedakah is usually translated as charity, but there is a crucial difference between the two concepts. When we understand the word tzedakah, we learn a profound lesson about the Jewish attitude toward giving. The root of the word tzedakah is *tzedek*, which means justice or righteousness. The word charity, however, carries intimations of benevolence. When we give tzedakah we do not believe that we have gone above and beyond the call of duty; rather, we have simply fulfilled the demands of justice; we've done the right thing. This belief is based on the concept that everything we possess is a gift from G-d, and He has specified that we should share it with others. Surely, if we share this gift we cannot claim to be doing anything extraordinary, merely that which is morally correct.

The concept of tzedakah is drawn from tzedek, but the two remain distinct terms and separate concepts. The basic difference between the two is that tzedek is systemic, addressing the core issue of social justice on a societal level. Tzedakah, on the other hand, is individual, consisting of local acts

that help the beneficiary in an immediate way, and simultaneously improve the character of the giver. Acts of tzedakah by community members contribute to the overall rule of tzedek in that society.

Whereas tzedakah entails the positive, proactive fulfillment of an obligation to be virtuous, tzedek is an absolute obligation which members of a society are compelled to pursue. Lack of tzedek means injustice, which is morally wrong.

3. Rambam, Moreh Nevuchim (Guide of the Perplexed), Part III, Ch. 53 – Tzedakah is an act of justice to our own soul, fulfilling its need for character refinement.

<p>The term tzedakah is derived from tzedek, righteousness. It denotes the act of giving everyone his due, of showing kindness to every being as is appropriate. In Scripture, however, the expression tzedakah is not used in the first sense, and does not apply to the payment of what we owe to others. Therefore, when we give the hired laborer his wages, or pay a debt, we do not perform an act of tzedakah. But we do perform an act of tzedakah when we fulfill our duties towards our fellow men; these duties develop within us a virtuous character: e.g., when we heal the wound of the sufferer. Thus, Scripture says, in reference to the returning of the pledge [to the poor debtor]: “And it shall be considered as tzedakah for you” (Devarim 24:11).</p>	<p>ומלת צדקה, היא נגזרת מצדק, והוא היושר, והיושר הוא להגיע כל בעל חק לחקו, ולתת לכל נמצא מן הנמצאות כפי הראוי לו, ולפי הענין הראשון לא יקראו בספרי הנבואה החוקים שאתה חייב בהם לזולתך כשתשלם, צדקה, כי כשתפרע לשכיר שכרו או תפרע חובך לא יקרא צדקה, אבל החוקים הראויים עליך לזולתך מפני מעלות המדות, כרפואת מחץ כל לחוץ, יקרא צדק, ומפני זה אמר בהשבת המשכון "ולך תהיה צדקה" (דברים כב:יא).</p>
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Hence, tzedek refers to the fulfillment of the basic demands of justice upon which society functions: equality before the law, sanctity of private property, provision of food and shelter for the needy, fair wages for work, etc. These are the kind of services usually provided by communal organizations or government agencies (in democratic societies). Hence, this berachah is a plea that G-d restore justice through the rule of Torah law by the morally scrupulous judges and leaders of the Jewish people.

It is important to note that Judaism maintains that true social justice can only be achieved by implementing Divine law. People have come up with many notions, created different forms of government, and advanced various economic systems in an attempt to promote social and economic justice. Judaism has its own vision of the just society and that vision relies on the wisdom of the Torah given to us by G-d.

4. Rabbi Elie Munk, The World of Prayer, Vol. 1, pg. 140 – Only with G-d's help can we create a perfectly just society.

<p>Many thousands of years of the history of law have proven to us only too clearly that a truly just social order will hardly ever be achieved by human effort alone. Scholars and philosophers have been laboring incessantly to create a system of legislation which would guarantee a just and equitable balance between the conflicting claims of all members of society, and thus would achieve peace and</p>

security on earth. Their failure reveals the human insufficiency in the face of this problem. It can be solved only by Divine act, and within a social system founded by Him. In this berachah we pray for the establishment of such an ideal system of justice. The abolition of injustice and oppression of tyranny and intolerance, will achieve, as an immediate result, the abolition of sorrow and sighing. Only within such a society living in serenity and peace will G-d reign in sovereign supremacy.

See further the Olami Morasha Class entitled, “The Power of Tzedakah.”

Part D. Sorrow and Groaning

People have many different kinds of problems, and we pray that G-d take these problems away. Each one of the thirteen middle berachot addresses a basic human need. Yet only in this berachah do we ask G-d to remove the “sorrow and groaning” associated with the problem at hand. Why?

1. Talmud Bavli, Shabbat 33a – Lack of justice is the source of many social ills.

As a punishment for delay of judgment, perversion of judgment, spoiling of judgment, and neglect of Torah, sword and spoil increase, pestilence and famine come, people eat and are not satisfied, and eat their bread in rations.	בעון עינאי הדין ועיוות הדין וקלקול הדין וביטול תורה חרב וביזה רבה, ודבר ובצורת בא, ובני אדם אוכלין ואינן שבעין, ואוכלין לחמם במשקל.
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2. Talmud Bavli, Shabbat 139a – G-d’s presence will not be with us until corrupt judges are removed.

It was taught: Rabbi Yosi ben Elisha said: If you see a generation overwhelmed by many troubles, go forth and examine the judges of Israel, for all retribution that comes to the world comes only on account of the Judges of Israel... And the Holy One, blessed be He, will not cause His Divine Presence to rest upon the Jews until the wicked judges and officers are eradicated from among them!	תניא, רבי יוסי בן אלישע אומר: אם ראית דור שצרות רבות באות עליו - צא ובדוק בדייני ישראל. שכל פורענות שבאה לעולם לא באה אלא בשביל דייני ישראל... ואין הקדוש ברוך הוא משרה שכינתו על ישראל עד שיכלו שופטים ושוטרים רעים מישראל.
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3. Mishnah, Sotah 48a – Without justice there is little to sing about.

When the Sanhedrin ceased [to function], song ceased from the places of feasting; as it is said, “they shall not drink wine with a song etc.” (Yeshaya/Isaiah 24:9).	משבטלה סנהדרין - בטל השיר מבית המשתאות, שנאמר: (ישעיהו כד) בשיר לא ישתו יין וגו'.
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Key Themes of דיין – Restoration of Justice.

- After praying for the Jews to return to their Land, we then pray for the Torah to return to its rightful place: at the center of a just society.
- The righteousness we pursue will pave the way for the Mashiach to establish this just society.

- We pray that our judges be honorable people like those of ancient Israel, great scholars and people of the highest moral caliber.
- This berachah is a plea for G-d to help us fulfill the basic demands of justice that helps society function, such as equality before the law and the sanctity of private property – moral and legal principles founded on Torah law.
- In the meantime, we lack a perfectly just society. As such, we suffer a host of personal and social ills that stem from this lack of justice.

Berachah 12. ברכת המינים (*Birkat HaMinim*) – Against Heretics

וְלַמְלִשְׁיָנִים אֵל תְּהִי תְקוּנָה. וְכָל הָרָשָׁעָה כְּרָגֶעַ תֵּאבֵד. וְכָל אוֹיְבֵי עַמְּךָ מִהֶרָה יִכָּרְתוּ. וְהַזֵּדִים מִהֶרָה תַעֲקֹר
וְתִשְׁפֹּר וְתִמְגֵּר וְתִכְנֹעַ בְּמַהֲרָה בְּיָמֵינוּ. בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ הֵזְכֵּר אוֹיְבֵינוּ וּמְכַנְיַע זֵדִים:

*And for the slanderers let there be no hope; and may all wickedness perish in an instant; and may all Your enemies be cut down speedily. May You speedily uproot, smash, cast down, and humble wanton sinners – speedily in our days.
Blessed are You, G-d, Who breaks enemies and humbles wanton sinners.*

The blessing against heretics was not part of the original eighteen berachot of the Shemoneh Esrei composed by the Men of the Great Assembly; it was added later out of historical necessity. Nevertheless it is placed here because the primary purpose of a judicial system is to eradicate evil from the world. Hence, after praying for the restoration of justice, we ask G-d to rid the world of evil.

Part A. The Origin of Birkat HaMinim

The turmoil at the end of the Second Temple (and its subsequent destruction) was accompanied by the rise of a number of heretical movements among the Jewish People. Sensing the threat that these groups posed to the survival of traditional Judaism, an additional blessing was incorporated into the Amidah with the goal of preventing their intermingling within Jewish society. *Birkat HaMinim*, the blessing against heretics, served to make those groups no longer feel comfortable praying in synagogues where the new blessing to the Amidah was added. This addition was also instituted under the auspices of the leader Rabban Gamliel in Yavneh.

1. Meir Holder, History of the Jewish People: From Yavneh to Pumbedisa, pg. 26 – The rise of various heretical groups geared at undermining Jewish tradition led to the need for a public berachah to denounce them.

During the final period of the Second Temple the Jewish people was split into various groups. While most of the people followed the Perushim (Pharisees), there were many sizable heretic factions, including the Tzedukim (Sadducees), Beitusim (Boethusians), Hellenists, Essenes, Judeo-Christians, etc. – all claiming to be Jews while flagrantly denying the authority of the Oral Law and fighting and denouncing each other. In fact, even during the rebellion against Rome (66-70 CE / 3826-3830), when unity was essential to success, these various groups spent more time and energy battling each other than fighting the Romans.

The Sages, with Rabban Gamliel at their head, now decided that this fragmentation was an intolerable state of affairs. The members of these dissenting sects associated freely with their fellow Jews and were almost indistinguishable from them. At the same time, however, they were dedicated to the destruction of the Jewish religion and its institutions, and many of the sect members felt personal hatred toward loyal Jews. Because they knew what their fellow Jews were doing and thinking, the members of these sects were dangerous traitors who often gave damaging information to the Romans. This was doubly dangerous in the unsettled times which followed the Destruction, when the Romans punished any suspicious act with bloody and ruthless reprisals. Also there was the serious danger that the growth of these heretical sects would cause more and more people to falsify the teachings of Judaism.

In order to purify the nation of all these dangerous heretical groups, the Sages gave Shmuel HaKatan the task of composing one additional blessing to be added to the Shemoneh Esrei, the "Eighteen Blessings" that had been formulated many centuries before by the Men of the Great Assembly. Shmuel HaKatan undertook the task. The powerful composition which resulted is known as the Birkat HaMinim, the "blessing against the heretics." It became the twelfth benediction of the Shemoneh Esrei.

The Birkat HaMinim, like the rest of the Shemoneh Esrei, was recited in public three times a day. Everyone knew perfectly well against whom this benediction was directed. The slanderers and sectarians, who did not wholeheartedly identify with the Jewish people and its traditions, could not easily bring themselves to utter this prayer. Thus it made them much easier to identify and exclude. This may well have had the effect of diminishing the numbers of people who called themselves Jews, but the resulting unity added immeasurably to Israel's strength.

As mentioned above, Shmuel HaKatan (Samuel the Small) was appointed to author this 19th blessing. The Talmud (Sanhedrin 11a) relates that he was called "the Small" not because of his physical stature but rather in comparison to the prophet with the same name: Shmuel HaNavi. While the term implies that he was the lesser of two great men, the comparison itself is a tribute to his greatness, perhaps a tribute to his great humility.

Below we shall explore the significance of his authorship.

2. Talmud Bavli, Berachot 28b – Shmuel HaKatan was selected to compose a new blessing, known as the blessing against the heretics, to be added to the eighteen blessings of the Amidah.

Rabban Gamliel said to the sages, "Is there no one who knows how to establish a prayer against the heretics?" Shmuel HaKatan stood up and established it.	אמר להם רבן גמליאל לחכמים כלום יש אדם שיודע לתקן ברכת הצדוקים? עמד שמואל הקטן ותקנה.
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Who was Shmuel HaKatan? Pirkei Avot, which records the main teachings of many Jewish leaders from Moshe Rabeinu through the time of the Mishnah, states that Shmuel HaKatan was known for repeating a particular verse from Mishlei (Proverbs). Considering his authorship of the blessing against heretics, his personal motto is surprising.

3. Pirkei Avot 4:19 – Shmuel HaKatan did not believe in rejoicing over the downfall of one's enemy.

Shmuel HaKatan would say: "When your enemy falls, do not rejoice; when he stumbles, let your heart not be gladdened. Perhaps G-d will see, and it will be displeasing in His eyes, and He will turn His anger from him [to you]" (Proverbs 24:17-18).	שמואל הקטן אומר (משלי כד) בנפול אויבך אל תשמח ובכשלו אל יגל לבך פן יראה ה' ורע בעיניו והשיב מעליו אפו:
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The truth is that Shmuel HaKatan was not chosen to compose the blessing against heretics despite his attitude toward enemies, but because of it.

4. Rabbi Irving M. Bunim, Ethics from Sinai, Vol. II, pg. 615 – Only Shmuel HaKatan could have authored the blessing against heretics.

[T]he Sages found it vitally necessary to add this paragraph. The infidel heretics had simply become too much. But only a man who bore no trace of personal animosity in his heart could set forth the words. In a prayer before the portals of Heaven, seeking Divine protection for the people of Israel in its historic destiny, that its life and faith might be safe, there was no room for personal vindictiveness or malicious hatred. Only Shmuel the “Little One,” humble and unassuming, formed it – the man who could not rejoice if a personal enemy fell. His words of prayer could flow from a pure love for his people, a yearning for their safety, and a desire to see their living Judaism guarded against inner destruction.

Part B. Praying for Repentance

Judaism maintains that it is always preferable for sinners to repent than be destroyed. That is always plan A. Praying for their destruction is only appropriate under dire circumstances which we will discuss below. Our primary hope is that *wickedness* itself should “perish from the earth.”

1. Talmud Bavli, Berachot 10a – Pray first that the sinners repent.

There were once some thieves in the neighborhood of Rabbi Meir, and they caused him a great deal of trouble. Rabbi Meir accordingly prayed that they should die. His wife Beruria said to him: How do you maintain [that such a prayer should be permitted]? Because it is written “Let sins cease”? Does it say “sinners”? No, it only says “sins”! Furthermore, look at the end of the verse: “and let the wicked men be no more.” Since the sins will cease, there will be no more wicked men! Rather, pray for them to repent, and there will be no more wickedness. He did pray for them, and they repented.	הנהו בריוני (פריצים) דהוו בשבבותיה דרבי מאיר והוו קא מצערו ליה טובא, הוה קא בעי רבי מאיר רחמי עלויהו כי היכי דלימותו. אמרה ליה ברוריא דביתהו: מאי דעתך? - משום דכתיב: (תהלים ק"ד) יתמו חטאים, מי כתיב חוטאים? חטאים כתיב! ועוד, שפיל לסיפיה דקרא: ורשעים עוד אינם, כיון דיתמו חטאים - ורשעים עוד אינם? אלא, בעי רחמי עלויהו דלהדרו בתשובה - ורשעים עוד אינם. בעא רחמי עלויהו דלהדרו בתשובה.
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But how can we pray for people to repent, when they have their own free will? Are we asking G-d to take it away?

2. Rabbi Shmuel Eidels (Maharsha), Chiddushei Agadot to Berachot 10a – How can prayer affect what is seemingly out of G-d’s hands?

It is difficult to understand how praying for someone else to repent is supposed to work when (as is stated below, Berachot 33), “Everything is in the hands of Heaven [except for the fear of Heaven itself]”?	לבקש רחמים על חברו להחזירו בתשובה קשה מה יועיל בקשתו הא אמרי' (לקמן לג) הכל בידי שמים כו'.
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Through *Hashgachah Pratit*, Divine Providence, G-d gives each of us unique attributes and life circumstances within which to exercise our free will. Whether or not we choose to listen to the word

of G-d is the one thing that that He leaves entirely up to us. So what good is it to pray to G-d to make *someone else* listen to Him?

While G-d generally chooses not to *make* people repent, He can nevertheless *help* people to repent without infringing upon their free will.

3. Rabbi Moshe Feinstein, Igrot Moshe, O.C. Vol. IV, 40:13 – We can pray that G-d help the transgressors find their way to repentance.

It must be that [Rabbi Meir's] prayer was that these people should no longer have the temptation (to transgress) and then they would automatically repent because the only reason they sinned was because of a lack of livelihood and the like. It is also feasible to pray that G-d arrange for them to hear words of moral instruction from righteous people and thus come to repent.	צריך לומר שהתפלה היתה שלא יהא להם נסיונות וממילא ישובו שלא היו חוטאים אלא מחוסר פרנסה וכדומה, וגם שייך להתפלל שהשי"ת יזמין להם שישמעו דברי מוסר מאנשים צדיקים וישובו עי"ז בתשובה.
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In respect to our free will, G-d will not “force” someone to repent. However, He certainly can “arrange” the circumstances that make repentance more amenable to people. The right word spoken by the right person at the right time can have a powerful effect. So, we can always pray that the wicked be afforded the chance to see things differently. The actual choice whether to heed that message or not is still up to the autonomous individual.

Part C. Praying for Evildoers to be Uprooted

Sometimes praying for repentance is not enough. Sometimes we simply have to pray that the evildoers themselves disappear. There are several scenarios in which such a prayer might be appropriate.

One example is the category of those who purposely lead others to sin with no remorse. For such people, G-d is not likely to arrange the circumstances for them to be able to correct the damage they have done.

1. Talmud Bavli, Yoma 87a – Making others transgress cuts a person off from repentance.

And whosoever causes the community to sin, he will have almost no opportunity to repent.	וכל המחטיא את הרבים - כמעט אין מספיק בידו לעשות תשובה.
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2. Rambam, Hilchot Teshuvah (Laws of Repentance) 4:1 – Some sins are so grave that even G-d will not facilitate the repentance of those who commit them.

There are 24 deeds which hold back Teshuvah: Four of them are severe sins, and G-d will not grant the person who commits such deeds to repent because of the gravity of his transgressions. They are:	ארבעה ועשרים דברים מעכבין את התשובה, ארבעה מהן עון גדול והעושה אחד מהן אין הקב"ה מספיק בידו לעשות תשובה לפי גודל חטאו. ואלו הן:
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<p>a) One who causes the masses to sin; included in this category is one who prevents the public from performing a positive command;</p> <p>b) One who leads his colleague astray from the path of good to that of bad; for example, one who proselytizes or serves as a missionary.</p> <p>c) One who sees his son becoming associated with evil influences and refrains from rebuking him. Since his son is under his authority, were he to rebuke him, he would have separated himself [from these influences]. Hence, [by refraining from admonishing him, it is considered] as if he caused him to sin.</p> <p>Included in this sin are also all those who have the ability to admonish others, whether an individual or a group, and refrain from doing so, leaving them [to perpetuate] their mistakes.</p> <p>d) One who says: "I will sin and then, repent." Included in this category is one who says: "I will sin and Yom Kippur will atone [for me]."</p>	<p>(א) המחטיא את הרבים ובכלל עון זה המעכב את הרבים מלעשות מצוה,</p> <p>(ב) והמטה את חבריו מדרך טובה לרעה כגון מסית ומדיח.</p> <p>(ג) הרואה בנו יוצא לתרבות רעה ואינו ממחה בידו, הואיל ובנו ברשותו אילו מיחה בו היה פורש ונמצא כמחטיאו,</p> <p>ובכלל עון זה כל שאפשר בידו למחות באחרים בין יחיד בין רבים ולא מיחה אלא יניחם בכשלונם,</p> <p>(ד) והאומר אחטא ואשוב ובכלל זה האומר אחטא ויום הכפורים מכפר.</p>
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3. Rabbi Avrohom Chaim Feuer, The Shemoneh Esrei pg. 181 – We pray that G-d neutralize enemies and wanton transgressors.

The *enemies* are the heretics who abandoned Judaism and make every effort to lead others astray... The *wanton sinners*, however, are not enemies of the faith, but rather captives of their Evil Inclination (*Yetzer Hara*) that incites them to rebel against the Torah and G-d's will. We pray that they be humbled and their evil impulse subdued, so that they will repent from their sinful ways.

These were the types of wickedness prevalent around the time this berachah was composed. Unfortunately, Jewish history has seen many forms of wickedness directed at undermining our faith and traditions.

4. Rabbi Shimon Schwab, On Prayer, pg. 479 – Christianity and Communism, each in their time, threatened the stability and survival of Judaism.

May you uproot, break, cut up, and humble the evildoers quickly, in our time. Before explaining the meaning of these various words – which all have the general meaning of "elimination" – it is important that we know that **והזדים**, meaning criminals, or *purposeful evildoers*, as used here, refers to another kind of enemy. It relates to those who attempt to influence Jews away from our *emunah*, and convert these Jews to their religion.

One of the tenets of Fundamentalist Christianity is that as long as there are "nonbelievers" who have not converted to their religion, the "second coming" of their "messiah" will not take place.

Consequently, proselytizing was widely practiced in the Middle Ages by the Church, often by means of forced conversions. Sometimes, Jews were forced to sit in their *shuls* and listen to hours of preaching about the Christian religion. Many of the preachers who delivered these "sermons" were converted Jews themselves. And even today, there are missionaries of various types, especially the group called "Jews for J-s," who, unfortunately, are very successful at their evil craft.

Another form of purposeful evil was Communism. Under its rule, Jews were not permitted to study Torah or practice their religion. People who were caught teaching students under the age of 18 were either sentenced to death or to exile in Siberia, which was sometimes even worse.

5. Ibid. – We pray that those who design evil against us will be disbanded and neutralized.

The terms uproot, smash, cast down, and humble were chosen very carefully:

- *To uproot* means to prevent any future growth. It is our prayer that any movement that attempts with evil intent to take Jews away from Judaism - either by force or by persuasion - shall be uprooted, and grow no further;
- *To smash* means here that they may break into various factions, each with differing approaches to converting Jews, thus rendering them ineffective in their evil objective;
- *[Cast down, alternatively] cut them up into small pieces*. We ask that these factions be divided into individuals who, while not as effective as a group, are nevertheless still dangerous on their own;
- *And humble them*. We ask that these remaining individual evildoers be humbled and rendered harmless.

Key Themes of ברכת המינים – Against Heretics.

- The berachah of ברכת המינים was added to the original Shemoneh Esrei soon after the destruction of the Second Temple. At that time the Land of Israel was rife with heretical splinter groups that sought to undermine traditional Judaism and to incite the Romans against those who adhered to it. This berachah was a plea to G-d to save us from their hands. It also served a practical function – to distinguish between the heretics and the true believers.
- We do not generally rejoice at our enemies' downfall, nor pray for them to be killed. Our foremost hope is that they repent of their own accord so that wickedness will vanish automatically. We even pray that G-d help our enemies to realize the error of their ways.
- Nevertheless, certain transgressions are so dangerous and pernicious that we cannot wait for their perpetrators to repent, nor does G-d even help such people to do so. In such a case we have to pray that the wicked people themselves meet their demise as soon as possible.

Berachah 13. צדיקים (Tzadikim) – The Righteous

על הצדיקים ועל החסידים. ועל זקני עמך בית ישראל. ועל פליטת סופריהם. ועל גרי הצדקה. ועלינו. יְהוָה רַחֲמֵיךָ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ. וְתֵן שָׂכָר טוֹב לְכָל הַבוֹטְחִים בְּשִׁמְךָ בְּאַמֶּת, וְשִׁים חֲלָקֵנוּ עִמָּהֶם וְלַעוֹלָם לֹא גִבוּשׁ כִּי כָךְ בִּטְחָנוּ וְעַל חֶסֶדְךָ הַגָּדוֹל בְּאַמֶּת וּבִתְמִים גִּשְׁעָנוּ. בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה מִשְׁעָן וּמִבְטָח לְצַדִּיקִים:

On the righteous, on the devout, on the elders of Your people the Family of Israel, on the remnant of their scholars, on the righteous converts and on ourselves – may Your compassion be aroused, G-d our L-rd, and give goodly reward to all who sincerely believe in Your Name. Put our lot with them forever, and we will not be ashamed, for we trust in You. Blessed are You, G-d, Mainstay and Assurance of the righteous.

Once we have prayed for the destruction of wickedness and all the pain it causes, we now turn to pray for the righteous, for they are the source of blessing in this world.

Part A. צדיקים – A Source of Blessing

On the righteous, on the devout – tzaddik (righteous) and chassid (devout) refer to spiritual levels of serving G-d and displaying ethical conduct of the highest order.

1. Mishlei (Proverbs) 10:25 and Talmud Bavli, Yoma 38b – The world carries on in the merit of the righteous.

When the storm passes, the wicked man is no more, but the tzaddik is the foundation of the world.	כעבור סופה ואין רשע וצדיק יסוד עולם:
Rabbi Chiya bar Abba said in the name of Rabbi Yochanan: The world endures on account of even one righteous individual, as it says, “the tzaddik is the foundation of the world” (Mishlei 10:25).	רבי חייא בר אבא אמר רבי יוחנן: אפילו בשביל צדיק אחד העולם מתקיים, שנאמר (משלי י', כה) וצדיק יסוד עולם.

2. Rabbi Yehonatan Eibschitz, Ya'arot Devash, Vol. 1, pg. 21 – The righteous are a source of blessing for us all.

In the blessing concerning the righteous, a person should concentrate on praying for the welfare of the righteous, because we live off of their goodness. As long as there are righteous people in the world, there is blessing and goodness and life in the world.	בברכת על הצדיקים ישים אל לבו להתפלל בטובת הצדיקים כי בטובתם אנו חיים וכל זמן שצדיקים בעולם ברכה וטובה וחיים בעולם.
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Part B. זקני עמך – Elders and Leaders

“Elders” in this context do not necessarily mean old people. A *zakein* refers to a wise person, particularly one who is a leader of the people.

1. Talmud Bavli, Kiddushin 32b – Elder refers to wisdom rather than age.

Rabbi Yossi HaGalili said: The only “elder” is the person who has acquired wisdom.	רבי יוסי הגלילי אומר: אין זקן אלא מי שקנה חכמה.
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2. Rabbi Yehuda ben Yakar, Peirush HaTefillot ve’HaBerachot, pg. 50 – Elders refers to communal leaders.

Also, “and upon the elders of Your people Israel...” – these are the people who are appointed over the community whether to pray, or judge, or organize. That is why we need to pray for them, for they take responsibility for the community.	ועוד ועל זקני עמך ישראל... ואלו אותם המתמנים על הציבור או להתפלל או להיות דיין או גבאי, ולכך יש להתפלל עליהם שהם ערבים על הציבור.
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Part C. פליטת סופריהם – Rabbis and Teachers

Sofrim is a general reference to scholars. In a sense these are the same people, i.e. the judges, who we prayed would return to us with the re-establishment of the Jewish court system and the adjudication of Torah law (See Berachah 11). Additionally, this phrase includes all those who teach the Torah to others, particularly the school teachers.

1. Eitz Yosef, Siddur Otzar HaTefillot, pg. 169 – We pray for the Jewish school teachers.

On the remnant of their scholars – these are the scholars and teachers of Jewish children about whom it is said, “those who bring the multitudes to righteousness like the stars forever and ever” (Daniel 12:3).	ועל פליטת ספריהם הם ספרים ומלמדי תינוקות עם ישראל שעליהם נאמר ומצדיקי הרבים ככוכבים לעולם ועד (דניאל יב, ג).
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Part D. גרי הצדק – Righteous Converts

Once someone converts to Judaism, he is a full-fledged Jew, so why do we single out converts to pray specifically for them? One reason may simply be that even after conversion, life is not all that easy for converts. However, their inclusion in this blessing and in the list of the righteous stems from something more – an appreciation of their inner greatness.

1. Rabbi Yehonatan Eibschitz, Ya’arot Devash, Vol. 1, pg. 21 – Appreciation of converts issues from a love of G-d.

We particularly pray for the welfare of righteous converts and pay close attention to love them as ourselves and to fulfill the mitzvah that “you shall love the convert.” All the more so these days when we are so lowly and have such little spirit left in us, while the wicked have the uppermost hand. And despite all this, the convert recognizes the truth! This is no less a feat than that of our forefather Abraham who recognized G-d amidst a world of darkness and “illuminated the east with righteousness.” The	וביחוד להתפלל על טובת גרי צדק וישים ללב לאהוב אותם כנפשו ולקיים מצות ואהבתם את הגר ומכ"ש בזמן הזה שאנו בתכלית השפלות ושחים עד לעפר כמעט לא נשאר בנו עוד רוח חיוני ורשעים בתכלית הרוממות והוא הכיר האמת הרי זה ממש מעשה אברהם אבינו שהכיר ה' בתוך עולם חשוך והאיר ממזרח צדק ואף הוא כמוהו הלא חיוב עלינו לאהבו ולנשק רמיסת רגלו והמרבה לאהוב הגר אוהב ה' ותורתו כי אהבתו לגר תלוי באהבת המקום ותורתו כי הלא זה סיבת אהבתו.
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convert is just like him. It is our duty to love him and to kiss the dust of his feet. The person who loves a convert demonstrates his love of G-d and His Torah, for the love of a convert emanates from a love of G-d and the Torah.	
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Part E. ותן שכר טוב – Give Goodly Reward

How can we ask G-d to reward us for believing and trusting in Him? Doesn't that make our religious life selfish and superficial?

The answer is that while we must believe in reward (and punishment), at the same time we may not let it be the motivation for doing what it intrinsically right.

1. Rabbi Yechiel Michel Stern, Siddur Iyun Tefillah, pg. 467 – Only those who serve G-d sincerely can actually ask for their due reward.

<p>In his book "Lechem Shamayim" on Pirkei Avot," Rabbi Yaakov Emden (the Yavetz) explains that even though it states in Pirkei Avot, "Do not be like servants who serve for the sake of receiving reward," that is only if the reward is a proviso for the service, like a servant who does not work when he is not paid. However, if one serves G-d without this proviso, that is to serve G-d whether or not there is reward for such service, then it is permissible to ask for the reward. On the contrary, one of the pillars of our faith is to believe in reward and punishment. This is just as King David said, "Guard my soul for I am devout"(Tehillim 86:2), which our Sages interpret to mean that David was saying to G-d, "G-d, I know that there is a generous reward awaiting the righteous in the World to Come, but I do not know if I have a portion with them. That is why I am asking for reward." And because the one who serves G-d "sincerely," although he might not be rewarded, can certainly ask for it, therefore we say here, "and give goodly reward to all who sincerely believe in Your Name," and are not acting only to receive the reward.</p>	<p>ביאר היעב"ץ בספר לחם שמים על אבות אע"פ שאמרו באבות אל תהיו כעבדים המשמשים על מנת לקבל פרס, זהו רק אם הפרס הוא תנאי לעבודה, כמו עבד שאם לא יתנו לו פרס לא יעבוד, אבל לעבוד את ה' בלא תנאי, דהיינו שגם אם לא יקבל שכר טוב ג"כ יעבוד את ה', לזה מותר לבקש שכר מה, 'ואדרבא מצינו שמעיקרי אמונה הוא להאמין בשכר ועונש, וכמו שאמר דוד שמרה נפשי כי חסיד אני וגו' ופירשו חז"ל (ילקוט שמעוני תהלים רמז תשז) שכך אמר דוד לפני הקב"ה יודע אני שיש שכר טוב לצדיקים לעתיד לבוא אבל איני יודע אם יש לי חלק עמהם, ולכן אני מבקש שכר. ומשום שמי שעובד ה' "באמת" אע"פ שלא יקבל שכר, הוא בודאי יכול לבקש שכר, וזהו שאמר כאן" ותן שכר טוב לכל הבוטחים בשמך באמת "ולא עושים רק על מנת לקבל פרס.</p>
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Key Themes of צדיקים – The Righteous.

- We pray for the righteous because they are a source of blessing in this world. In fact, it is in their merit that the world continues to exist.
- In this prayer we pray for the benefit of many types of righteous individuals, including communal leaders, school teachers, and converts.
- Converts deserve to be counted among the righteous in recognition of their amazing feat of recognizing the truth amidst a world of falsehood.
- We ask to be rewarded for our faith along with all these righteous people, because we know they serve G-d whole-heartedly, not merely to receive that reward.

Berachah 14. בנין ירושלים (*Binyan Yerushalayim*) – Rebuilding Jerusalem

וְלִירוּשָׁלַיִם עִירְךָ בְּרַחֲמִים תָּשׁוּב. וְתִשְׁכַּן בְּתוֹכָהּ כְּאֲשֶׁר דִּבַּרְתָּ. וּבִנְיָה אוֹתָהּ בְּקָרוֹב בְּיָמֵינוּ בְּגֵן עוֹלָם. וְכִסֵּא
דָּוִד מְהֵרָה לְתוֹכָהּ תָּכִין. בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה בּוֹנֵה יְרוּשָׁלַיִם:

*And to Jerusalem, Your city, may You return in compassion, and may You rest within it, as You have spoken. May
You rebuild it soon in our days as an eternal structure, and may You speedily establish the throne of David within it.
Blessed are You, G-d, the Builder of Jerusalem.*

Having prayed for the welfare of the righteous, we now turn our attention to the place where they will ultimately dwell in the Messianic era: Jerusalem.

Part A. Rebuild Again?

Modern Jerusalem is a thriving metropolis with hundreds of thousands of people. It has a modern infrastructure and all the amenities of contemporary culture. Why then do we still pray for it to be rebuilt? It already is!

1. Rabbi Avrohom Chaim Feuer, *Shemoneh Esrei*, pp. 208-209 – Only Jerusalem's spiritual structure gives it permanence.

Visiting the modern city of Jerusalem, one beholds a beautiful urban complex replete with every type of structure and institution necessary for quality living. The rebuilt Jerusalem of our times serves all the physical and spiritual needs of her citizens. So the obvious question arises: Why do we continue to plead for the rebuilding of Jerusalem?

This question can be answered with an analogy to the patient whose heart is diseased and who receives an artificial heart. The patient is up and around and appears to be healthy, but inside he is filled with anxiety lest the artificial device be rejected or malfunction. The transplant patient is extremely vulnerable to infection, and distressingly susceptible to unexpected, lethal side effects. As advanced as technology may be, artificial is not the real thing.

Similarly, the heart of mankind in general and the Jews in particular is the Beit HaMikdash, the Holy Temple. In that location Adam, the father of mankind, was created and there G-d breathed life into his nostrils. G-d continued to pump vitality into mankind through the Temple until it was destroyed. Now, we are maintained artificially, but it is not the same! We are weak and fragile, susceptible to spiritual and moral contamination and disease. We are easily worn out. The whole system can collapse at any time.

All the yeshivas, schools, shuls and other holy places we see today in Jerusalem are wonderful, but they are not the Temple. They [no less than the modern State of Israel itself – ed.] are weak and fragile and can easily fall. There is no guarantee of their permanence. Therefore, we fervently pray for the rebuilding of Jerusalem with the Temple at its center – for that alone will be an eternal structure.

2. Rabbi Chaim Friedlander, Sifte Chaim (Rinat Chaim), pg. 185 – If we understood what Jerusalem once was, then we would know why we pray for it to be rebuilt.

Only when we know and understand what the greatness of Jerusalem in its built state used to be – both physically and more importantly spiritually – can we appreciate how terrible and bitter its state of ruin is today. And this will form the response to all those who question the pertinence of calling Jerusalem “the desolate and ruined city” (from the <i>Nacheim</i> prayer for Tisha B’Av), when today it is filled with beautiful buildings and many inhabitants. Whoever feels this way does not understand the true essence of Jerusalem when it was full of spirituality and holiness. But the one who knows what Jerusalem once was, feels all too well that today we are indeed in a deep pit and that for this we need to awaken great mercy from G-d – and this is what we mean by “return in mercy.”	כאשר יודעים ומבינים מה היתה גדלותה - הגשמית ובעיקר הרוחנית - של ירושלים בבניינה, חשים היטב באיזה מידה רע ומר מצבה בחורבנה כיום. וזו תשובה לאלו הטוענים, איך אפשר לומר "העיר החרבה והשוממה וכו'" (תפילת "נחם"), כאשר ירושלים מלאה בבנינים נאים, ורבו תושביה. כי מי שמרגיש כך אינו מבין את מהותה של ירושלים האמיתית בבניינה, שהיתה מלאה ברוחניות ובקדושה. אך מי שיודע מה היתה ירושלים, מרגיש היטב שכיום אנו עדיין בבירא עמיקתא, וזה צריך לעורר רחמים גדולים מהשי"ת, וזהו "ברחמים תשוב".
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Part B. Jerusalem of Old

What did the Jerusalem of old have that we lack in modern-day Jerusalem? How was it different, and how would we like it to be once again?

Jerusalem of old was a city of great physical beauty.

1. Talmud Bavli, Kiddushin 49b – Jerusalem is the site of the greatest beauty in the world.

Ten measures of beauty came into the world; Jerusalem took nine of them and the rest went to the whole world.	עשרה קבים יופי ירדו לעולם, תשעה נטלה ירושלים, ואחד כל העולם כולו.
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2. Talmud Bavli, Sukkah 51b – Jerusalem’s beauty was par excellence.

Someone who never saw Jerusalem in her splendor never saw a delightful city in his life.	מי שלא ראה ירושלים בתפארתה לא ראה כרך נחמד מעולם.
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Despite its physical beauty, the main virtues of Jerusalem were spiritual in nature. It was a city of awe-inspiring spirituality and wisdom of the Divine.

3. Talmud Bavli, Pesachim 8b – G-d did not bless Jerusalem with the virtue of every physical amenity so as not to distract its visitors from the main attraction in the city – its spirituality.

Rabbi Avin son of Rabbi Adda said in Rabbi Yitzchak’s name: “Why are there no fruits of Ginossar in Jerusalem? So that the Festival pilgrims should not say, ‘Had we merely ascended in order to eat the fruits of Ginossar in	אמר רבי אבין בר רב אדא אמר רבי יצחק: מפני מה אין פירות גינוסר בירושלים - כדי שלא יהו עולי רגלים אומרים: אלמלא לא עלינו אלא לאכול פירות גינוסר בירושלים - דיינו, נמצאת עלייה שלא לשמה. כיוצא בו אמר רבי דוסתאי ברבי ינאי: מפני מה אין חמי טבריא
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Jerusalem it would have sufficed us,' with the result that the pilgrimage would not be for its own sake." Similarly Rabbi Dosetai son of Rabbi Yannai said: "Why are the hot springs of Tiberias not [found] in Jerusalem? So that the Festival pilgrims should not say: 'Had we merely ascended in order to bathe in the hot springs, it would have sufficed us,' with the result that the pilgrimage would not be for its own sake."	בירושלים - כדי שלא יהו עולי רגלים אומרים: אלמלא לא עלינו אלא לרחוץ בחמי טבריא - דיינו, ונמצאת עלייה שלא לשמה.
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Jerusalem was the spiritual heart of the Land, pumping knowledge of G-d and the Torah throughout the Jewish world.

4. Talmud Bavli, Bava Batra 21a with Commentary of Tosafot – Jerusalem inspired the teaching of Torah.

<p>[At one point in Jewish history] it was decreed that school teachers should settle in Jerusalem. What was the scriptural support for such a decree? "For from Zion shall go forth Torah" (Yeshayahu 2:3).</p> <p>Tosafot: <i>For from Zion shall go forth Torah</i> – For when the teachers would see the great holiness and the Kohanim (Priests) performing their Divine service, they would direct their hearts more intensely toward the fear of G-d and Torah study. This notion is supported by the Midrashic explanation (Sifri) of the verse [regarding the second tithe which must be consumed in Jerusalem], "so you will learn to remain in awe [of G-d your L-rd for all time]" (Devarim 14:23): Great is the second tithe for it encourages study, for when the person who brings it stays in Jerusalem until he has consumed it and sees all the people there engaged in holy matters and the Divine service, he too directs his heart to fear of Heaven and engages in learning Torah.</p>	<p>התקינו שיהיו מושבין מלמדי תינוקות בירושלים, מאי דרוש? כי מציון תצא תורה (ישעיהו ב, ג).</p> <p>כי מציון תצא תורה - לפי שהיה רואה קדושה גדולה וכהנים עוסקים בעבודה היה מכוון לבו יותר ליראת שמים וללמוד תורה כדדרש' בספרי למען תלמד ליראה וגו' גדול מעשר שני שמביא לידי תלמוד לפי שהיה עומד בירושלים עד שיאכל מעשר שני שלו והיה רואה שכולם עוסקים במלאכת שמים ועבודה היה גם הוא מכוון ליראת שמים ועוסק בתורה.</p>
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Tosafot mentions the "second tithe," a tithe on produce that had to be eaten in Jerusalem (or redeemed for money that had to be used to purchase food to be eaten there). This is just one of the mitzvot that tie the Jewish people to Jerusalem. The second tithe, first fruits, first-born cattle, fourth-year produce – all these mitzvot involved either bringing food offerings and animal sacrifices to Jerusalem or spending their equivalent monetary value in the city. In addition to the three yearly pilgrimage festivals when Jews would visit Jerusalem, these mitzvot helped to spread the spiritual influence of Jerusalem to Jews everywhere.

5. Rabbi Aharon of Barcelona, Sefer HaChinuch, Mitzvah 360 – Jerusalem was the headquarters for learning Torah.

Either the owner of the produce/money (to be consumed/spent in Jerusalem) would go himself and learn Torah there or he would send one of his children to learn there and live off of that produce. As such, every household in the Land of Israel had a wise family member who knew the Torah, and he would teach the rest of the family – and thus the whole land was full of the knowledge of G-d.	או ילך שם בעל הממון עצמו ללמוד תורה או ישלח לשם אחד מבניו שילמד שם ויהיה ניזון באותן פירות. ומתוך כך יהיה בכל בית ובית מכל ישראל איש חכם יודע התורה, אשר ילמד בחכמתו כל בית אביו, ובכך תימלא הארץ דעה את ה'.
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Part C. עירך – G-d's City

Why do we refer to Jerusalem as G-d's city? Why not the City of the Jews or the City of Peace, etc.?

As we noted above, the central virtue of Jerusalem is its spirituality. The presence of G-d in the city, particularly at the site of the Beit HaMikdash, the Holy Temple, is the essence of Jerusalem's uniqueness.

1. Bereishit Rabbah 59:5 – While Jerusalem is the spiritual source for the world, G-d is the spiritual Source of Jerusalem.

Jerusalem is the light of the world, as it is says, "Nations shall go by your light" (Yeshayahu 60:3). And who was the light of Jerusalem? G-d, as it is written, "for the L-rd shall be to you as an everlasting light" (Ibid. 60:19).	ירושלים אורו של עולם שנאמר (ישעיה ס, ג) והלכו גוים לאורך ומי הוא אורה של ירושלים הקב"ה דכתיב והיה לך ה' לאור עולם (ישעיה ס:ט).
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The Jerusalem that we refer to in this berachah is not only the physical site of Jerusalem; we also mean the spiritual entity that is Jerusalem. That is why we call it G-d's city.

2. Talmud Bavli, Taanit 5a with Commentary of Maharsha – Jerusalem on earth is paralleled by a Jerusalem in Heaven; G-d does not enter one until He enters the other.

Further, Rabbi Nachman said to Rabbi Yitzchak: What is the meaning of the scriptural verse, 'In your midst is the Holy One, and I (G-d) will not enter a city' (Hoshea 11:9)? [Surely, it cannot be that] because the Holy One is in your midst that He shall not come into the city! He replied: Thus said Rabbi Yochanan: The Holy One, blessed be He, said, 'I will not enter the Heavenly Jerusalem until I enter the earthly Jerusalem.' Is there then a Heavenly Jerusalem? – Yes; for it is written, "The built-up Jerusalem is like a city that was joined together with itself" (Tehillim 122:3).	ואמר ליה רב נחמן לרבי יצחק: מאי דכתיב [הושע יא, ט] בקרבך קדוש ולא אבוא בעיר, משום דבקרבתך קדוש לא אבוא בעיר? - אמר ליה, הכי אמר רבי יוחנן: אמר הקדוש ברוך הוא לא אבוא בירושלים של מעלה עד שאבוא לירושלים של מטה. ומי איכא ירושלים למעלה? - אין, דכתיב [תהלים קכב:ג] ירושלים הבנויה כעיר שחברה לה יחדו.
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This means to say that the rebuilt Jerusalem below resembles the Jerusalem that is “joined together with itself,” meaning that in Heaven above it is facing the Jerusalem below which itself is aligned with the “gate of Heaven.”	כלומר ירושלים הבנויה למטה היא כעיר ירושלים שחזרה לה כו' דהיינו שהיא למעלה בשמים נגד ירושלים שלמטה שהיא מכוונת כנגד שער השמים.
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Part D. כאשר דברת – As You Have Spoken

Where did G-d talk about returning to Jerusalem? To which prophecy does this statement refer?

The rebuilding of Jerusalem, like the ingathering of exiles, is another one of the prophecies related to the coming of the Mashiach.

1. Talmud Bavli, Berachot 49a – The rebuilding of Jerusalem is connected to the ingathering of the exiles.

“The Builder of Jerusalem, G-d, will gather in the outcasts of Israel” (Tehillim 147:2), as if to say: When does G-d build Jerusalem? – When He will gather the dispersed of Israel.	בונה ירושלים ה' נדחי ישראל יכנס [תהלים קמ"ז:ב], אימתי בונה ירושלים ה' - בזמן שנדחי ישראל יכנס.
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More generally, the rebuilding of Jerusalem is seen as a sign of redemption for the Jewish people.

2. Yeshayahu (Isaiah) 52:9 – G-d will rebuild the ruins of Jerusalem when He redeems the Jewish people.

Burst out in song, sing together, O ruins of Jerusalem, for the L-rd has consoled His people; He has redeemed Jerusalem.	פצחו רננו יחדו חרבות ירושלים כי נחם יקוק עמו גאל ירושלים:
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3. Zechariah 8:3, 8, 22-23 – The rebuilding of Jerusalem will usher in a renewal of the Jewish people's relationship with G-d. Jerusalem will be the world's center of spirituality, and the Jews will be teachers and priests to all humanity.

So said the L-rd of Legions: I have returned to Zion, and I have made My dwelling in Jerusalem; Jerusalem will be called, 'The City of Truth' and the mountain of G-d, L-rd of Legions, 'The Holy Mountain.'	כה אמר יקוק שבתי אל ציון ושכנתי בתוך ירושלים ונקראה ירושלים עיר האמת והר יקוק צבאות הר הקדש...
And I will bring them, and they shall dwell in the midst of Jerusalem; and they shall be My people, and I shall be their G-d, in truth and in righteousness...	והבאתי אתם ושכנו בתוך ירושלים והיו לי לעם ואני אהיה להם לאלהים באמת ובצדקה...
And many peoples and powerful nations shall come to entreat the L-rd of Legions in Jerusalem, and to pray before the L-rd. So said the L-rd of Legions: In those days, when ten men of all the languages of the nations shall take	ובאו עמים רבים וגוים עצומים לבקש את יקוק צבאות בירושלים ולחלות את פני יקוק: כה אמר יקוק צבאות בימים ההמה אשר יחזיקו עשרה אנשים מכל לשנות הגוים והחזיקו בכנף איש יהודי לאמר נלכה עמכם כי שמענו אלהים עמכם:

hold of the garment of a Jewish man, saying, "Let us go with you, for we have heard that G-d is with you."	
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Part E. **ובנה אותה** – And Rebuild It

What does it mean that we ask G-d to rebuild Jerusalem? Do we expect G-d to actually build the city, or are we asking for permission to build it ourselves?

In the berachah of the Ingathering of the Exiles we saw that Rambam lists the rebuilding of the Beit HaMikdash as one of the tasks of the Mashiach. A source for Rambam's stance can be found in the Midrash.

1. Vayikra Rabbah, Parshat Tzav 9:6 – The Mashiach will build the Beit HaMikdash.

And I will unbridle and entice you and lead you up from the utmost parts of the north (and bring you upon the mountains of Israel) [Yechezkel 39:2]. The King Mashiach whose place is in the north will come and build the Beit HaMikdash whose place is in the south.	ושובבתיך וששאתיך והעליתיך מירכתי צפון (יחזקאל לט, ב): מלך המשיח שנתון בצפון יבא ויבנה בהמ"ק הנתון בדרום.
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The Mashiach will not do it alone; the entire Jewish people will also contribute to the financing and construction of the Beit HaMikdash.

2. Rambam, Hilchot Beit HaBechira 1:1,11-12 – It is a mitzvah for everyone to contribute to the building of the Beit HaMikdash.

It is a positive commandment to construct a House for G-d...	מצות עשה לעשות בית לה'...
The most preferable way to fulfill the mitzvah is by strengthening the building and glorifying it [to the utmost degree] within the means of the community, as [implied by Ezra 9:9]: "to exalt the House of our L-rd." They must make it beautiful and attractive according to their capabilities. If possible, it is a mitzvah to plate it with gold and to aggrandize it in any respect.	ומצוה מן המובהר לחזק את הבנין ולהגביהו כפי כח הציבור שנאמר ולרומם את בית אלקינו (עזרא ט, ט), ומפארין אותו ומייפין כפי כחן אם יכולין לטוה אותו בזהב ולהגדיל במעשיו ה"ז מצוה...
Everyone is obligated to build and to assist both personally and financially; [both] men and women, as [they did in the construction of the] Sanctuary in the desert.	והכל חייבין לבנות ולסעד בעצמן ובממונם אנשים ונשים כמקדש המדבר...

Thus, according to Rambam, we ask G-d to rebuild Jerusalem with the Temple therein much in the same way we ask for health or livelihood: We request that G-d bless our endeavors so we may succeed in accomplishing these goals.

However, there is a prominent opinion countering that of Rambam. This view says that the third and final Beit HaMikdash will literally be built by G-d Himself.

3. Rashi, Commentary to Sukkah 41a – The third Beit HaMikdash shall fall into place from Heaven.

The Beit HaMikdash for which we yearn is already built and finished. It will be revealed and it will come from Heaven, as the verse says, “the Sanctuary, O L-rd, [which] Your hands founded” (Shemot 15:17).	מקדש העתיד שאנו מצפין בנוי ומשוכלל הוא יגלה ויבא משמים, שנאמר (שמות טו, יז) מקדש ה' כוננו ידיך.
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Rashi's opinion also seems to be supported by a Midrash that states that the Beit HaMikdash will be built by G-d.

4. Midrash Tanchumah (Warsaw), Parshat Pekudei 11 – King David implied that the Beit HaMikdash will be built by G-d.

King David said, “For You have made me happy O L-rd, with Your work; with the work of Your hands I shall exult” (Tehillim 92:5). “For You have made me happy O L-rd, with Your work” refers to the Tabernacle; “with the work of Your hands I shall exult” refers to the building of the Beit HaMikdash, may it be built speedily in our days.	אמר המלך דוד כי שמחתני ה' בפעלך במעשי ידיך ארנן (תהלים צב, ה), כי שמחתני ה' בפעלך זה אהל מועד, במעשי ידיך ארנן זה בנין בית המקדש שיבנה במהרה בימינו.
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This building will be a **בנין עולם**, an eternal and indestructible building, precisely because it will be G-d Who has built it.

5. Midrash Tanchumah (Buber), Parshat Noach 11 – The Jerusalem that G-d will build will be eternal.

The Jewish people said to G-d, “Have we not already built Jerusalem and it was destroyed?” G-d said back to them, “Because of transgression it was destroyed and you were driven away from her, but now I will build her and I will never destroy her,” as the verse says, “For the L-rd has built up Zion; He has appeared in His glory” (Tehillim 102:17).	אמרו ישראל לפני הקב"ה רבוננו של עולם לא כבר גבנית ירושלים וחרבה, אמר להם על ידי עונות חרבה וגליתם מתוכה, אבל עתה אני בונה אותה, ואיני מחריבה לעולם, שנאמר כי בנה ה' ציון נראה בכבודו (תהלים קב, יז).
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How are we to resolve this dispute between Rambam and Rashi as to whether the Jewish people, with the help of Mashiach, will build the Beit HaMikdash, or whether it will descend from Heaven already built?

Here we will present two approaches:

6. Rabbi Yaakov Ettlinger, Aruch LaNer to Sukkah 41a – The soul of the Beit HaMikdash will descend into the body of the physical Beit HaMikdash that we will build.

<p>According to Rashi it should say “speedily will the Beit HaMikdash be <i>revealed</i>” (rather than be built)...And what we pray in our prayers, “May it be Your will that the Beit HaMikdash be built speedily in our days” seems to be a prayer in vain because it is already built. We should rather pray that it should be speedily <i>revealed</i>.</p> <p>Rather, it seems to me obvious that the Beit HaMikdash will literally be built in the future by human hands. When it says, “the Sanctuary, O L-rd, [which] Your hands founded,” which the Midrash takes to mean that it will fall from Heaven, it refers to the spiritual Beit HaMikdash that will descend upon the physically built Beit HaMikdash, like the soul into a body.</p>	<p>ולפי דברי רש"י הל"ל מהרה יגלה ביהמ"ק... ומה שאנו מתפללים בכל תפלותינו יה"ר שיבנה ביהמ"ק במהרה בימינו יהיו תפלות שוא כיון שכבר נבנה הוא והי' לנו להתפלל שיגלה ביהמ"ק במהרה.</p> <p>ולכן הי' נלענ"ד דודאי ביהמ"ק לעתיד לבא יבנה בנין ממש בידי אדם ומה שנאמר מקדש ד' כוננו ידיך שנדרש בתנחומא שירד למטה הוא ביהמ"ק רוחני שיבא לתוך ביהמ"ק הנבנה גשמי כנשמה בתוך הגוף.</p>
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According to this approach, Rambam speaks from the physical, this-worldly perspective while Rashi speaks from the spiritual, Heavenly perspective – but both are true.

Yet, there is another way of interpreting this dispute. This interpretation shows that both sides present a truthful perspective. It is based on the idea that there are two possible time frames for the coming of Mashiach, and therefore also two possible manners in which the Beit HaMikdash might be built. The Talmud derives this idea from Yeshayahu’s prophecy about the Messianic era.

7. Yeshayahu 60:22 and Talmud Bavli, Sanhedrin 98a – Mashiach will come at the predetermined time, but if we are worthy he may come sooner.

<p>The smallest shall become a thousand and the least a mighty nation; I am the L-rd, in its time I will hasten it.</p> <p>Rabbi Alexandri said: Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi contrasted [the words in the verse]. It is written “in its time,” and it is written, “I will hasten it”! If they are worthy, then “I will hasten it”; if they are not worthy, it will come “in its time.”</p>	<p>הקטן יהיה לאלף והצעיר לגוי עצום אני יקוק בעתה אחישנה:</p> <p>אמר רבי אלכסנדר: רבי יהושע בן לוי רמי, כתיב (ישעיהו ס') בעתה, וכתיב, אחישנה! זכו - אחישנה, לא זכו - בעתה.</p>
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8. Rabbi Moshe Schik, Teshuvot Maharam Schik – Rashi and Rambam describe two different potential ways that the future may unfold.

<p>It seems most logical that this [dispute between Rambam and Rashi] depends on the two time frames mentioned above. If the Messianic era will come “in its time,” it will all happen according to the natural order, as Rambam writes in the Laws of Kings mentioned above.</p>	<p>ויותר נראה דזה עצמו תליא בב' קיצין הנזכר לעיל דאם יהיה קץ של בעתו יהיה הכל כסדר וכמו שכתב הרמב"ם בהלכות מלכים הנזכר לעיל אבל אם יהיה קץ של אחישנה אז יהא הכל במהירות ומהרה יבנה בית המקדש בידי שמים ויבוא משיח צדקינו.</p>
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But if the Messianic era will come at a hastened time [i.e. earlier than the predestined time], then it will all happen quickly, the Beit HaMikdash will be built speedily by Heaven and then our righteous Mashiach will come.	
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According to this way of looking at things, we can all have a personal part in the building of the Beit HaMikdash and in hastening its arrival. The Chassidic masters have taught us that our mitzvot contribute to the building, which will one day fall from Heaven in completed form.

Once upon a time, the Sanzer Rav, the Divrei Chaim, told his Chassidim that the Beit HaMikdash was sitting in Heaven already completed; all it needed was the parochet, the dividing curtain, and it could be revealed. One of the Chassidim could not contain himself and shouted out his question, "If so, Rebbe, why don't you complete it so that we can have the Beit HaMikdash?" The Divrei Chaim responded vehemently, "We have made the parochet again and again! – but each time we do, it is torn to shreds by someone's transgression!" (Based on Rabbi Asher Zelig Weiss, Minchat Asher, Vol. 2 [Shemot], pg. 534.)

Key Themes of בנין ירושלים – Rebuilding Jerusalem.

- In this berachah we pray for the rebuilding of Jerusalem, a strange request considering that modern Jerusalem is a thriving metropolis. But looks can be deceiving – Jerusalem still lacks its true spiritual splendor.
- In ancient times Jerusalem was indeed a physically spectacular city, but its beauty was not its main attraction. Jerusalem was the world headquarters for wisdom and inspired all who visited it to want to learn.
- The physical Jerusalem is paralleled by a spiritual Jerusalem in Heaven. This idea teaches us that G-d is the source of Jerusalem's uniqueness.
- Many prophecies relate to the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the re-establishment of its spiritual stature as a highlight of the Messianic era. According to Rambam, the Mashiach will initiate the rebuilding of Jerusalem with the Temple as its centerpiece, while the Jewish people on the whole will contribute to the effort.
- Rashi, however, maintains that the third Beit HaMikdash is ready and waiting to fall into place from Heaven.
- Rambam and Rashi may be speaking from different perspectives, Rambam describing the physical process of rebuilding while Rashi refers to its spiritual existence. Alternatively, Rambam describes events as they will happen if history is left to run its course until G-d sends the Mashiach at some predetermined time in the future. Rashi, though, describes a situation in which, because of our mitzvot, the Mashiach will come and the Beit HaMikdash will be built sooner than planned.

Berachah 15. מלכות בית דוד (*Malchut Beit David*) – Davidic Reign

אַתָּה צֹמֵחַ דָּוִד עֲבָדְךָ מְהֵרָה תַּצְמִיחַ. וְקִרְנֵנוּ תָרוּם בִּישׁוּעָתְךָ. כִּי לִישׁוּעָתְךָ קִוִּינוּ כָּל הַיּוֹם. בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה
מִצְמִיחַ קֶרֶן יִשׁוּעָה:

May you speedily cause the offspring of Your servant David to sprout, and enhance his pride through Your salvation, for we hope for Your salvation all day long. Blessed are You, G-d, Who causes the pride of salvation to sprout.

Part A. The Centrality of Belief in Mashiach

The belief in the coming of Mashiach is one of the cornerstones of Judaism because it expresses faith that G-d has a plan for world history.

1. Rambam, Thirteen Principles of Faith, Principle 12 – Belief in the coming of the Mashiach is one of the Thirteen Principles of Faith.

<p>The Twelfth Principle is the time of the Mashiach (literally, the anointed). This means to believe and be certain that he will come, and not to think that he is late in coming, "if he tarries, wait for him; [because he will surely come, he will not come late]" (Chabakuk 2:3). You should not set a time for him, and you should not make calculations in Scripture to determine the time of his coming. The Sages say, "Let despair come upon those who calculate deadlines." [This foundation further includes] to believe in him (Mashiach), to magnify his greatness, to love him, and to pray that he will come, as was prophesied by all the prophets, from Moshe, peace be upon him, until Malachi, peace be upon him. One who doubts this or who minimizes his greatness denies the Torah that testifies explicitly to [the coming of Mashiach] in the account of Bilaam (Bamidbar [Numbers] 24) and in the portion of Nitzavim (Devarim [Deuteronomy] 30:3-5). Included in this principle is that the Jewish people will only have a king from the House of David and the offspring of Solomon. Anyone who disagrees with [the status of] this family denies G-d and His prophets.</p>	<p>היסוד השנים עשר, ימות המשיח. והוא להאמין ולצאת שיבוא, ולא יחשוב שיתאחר, "אם יתמהמה חפה לו" (חבקוק ב ג). ולא ישים לו זמן, ולא יעשה לו סברות במקראות להוציא זמן ביאתו. והחכמים אומרים (סנהדרין צ"ו ע"א): "תפח רוחן של מחשבי קצין". ושיאמין בו, ולגדלו ולצבבו, ולהתפלל בשבילו [=שיבוא], כפי מה שנבאו עליו כל הנביאים ממשה עד מלאכי השלום. ומי שהסתפק בו, או נתמעט אצלו מעלתו – כפר בתורה, שיעדו בו בתורה בפירוש בפרשת בלעם (במדבר כד, יז-כד) ו"אתם נצבים" (דברים ל, ג-י). ומכלל יסוד זה שאין מלך לישראל אלא מבית דוד ומזרע שלמה בלבד. וכל החולק על המשפחה הזאת – כפר בשם יתברך ובדברי נביאיו.</p>
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2. Rambam, Hilchot Melachim 11:1 – So central is Judaism's belief in the coming of the Mashiach that one who denies it, or does not await his arrival is considered to have denied the entire Torah.

<p>Anyone who does not believe in the Mashiach, or anyone who does not wait for his arrival is not</p>	<p>וכל מי שאינו מאמין בו, או מי שאינו מחכה לביאתו--לא בשאר נביאים בלבד הוא כופר, אלא בתורה ובמשה</p>
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only denying the validity of the Prophets (Nevi'im), but of the Torah [itself] and Moshe Rabeinu.	רבנו.
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Why should someone who rejects the concept of Mashiach be viewed as denying the validity of Judaism?

3. Rabbi Yisroel Miller, What's Wrong with Being Happy? Mesorah Publications, pp. 72-74 – Mashiach is the culmination of G-d's careful orchestration and supervision of each detail of world history. Not believing in Mashiach undermines the basic foundation of Divine Providence, and hence Judaism itself.

The general principle is that all of us live life on two different levels. We are tested each day to see if we choose to do what is right, and we each pass or fail the tests to a greater or lesser extent. And each day, regardless of what we do, G-d takes what we have created, and what we've done and what we are, and He finds a way to use it all to further His plan of goodness for the world. We don't know all the details. But we *do* know that no human life is totally wasted, no suffering is meaningless, and everything that happens is somehow fitted into G-d's plan...

Even if you recognize that you are here on earth to perform mitzvot and pass tests, if you mistakenly believe that life in itself has no ultimate purpose, that it's only a game and there is no other reason for suffering and death, no plan or purpose in all that occurs, then you may be performing mitzvot, but what you are doing is not Judaism.

Consider the enormity of the Holocaust, followed by the emergence of the State of Israel. Contemplate the resurgence of anti-Semitism even in countries without Jews, like Poland and Japan. Follow the amazing career of Yasser Arafat, who came to power and lost power a half a dozen times, each time miraculously making a comeback. Look at all the ups and downs of the past generation, like Vietnam, Watergate, Iran, Soviet collapse, intifada, hippies, race riots, energy crisis, and a million other changes. Do you believe *all that* has no purpose, that G-d just lets it happen without any reason? If so, Rambam tells us, you missed the boat. "I *believe* – I know – it is all part of the plan; and though I know not the details, and it has taken longer than I anticipated, I know it is all but a series of steps leading to the coming of Mashiach."

Part B. Davidic Dynasty

Why is our prayer for the coming of the Mashiach expressed as a longing for the re-establishment of the Davidic Dynasty? Why does the Mashiach have to be a descendant of King David and of what significance is his ancestry?

1. Bereishit (Genesis) 49:10, with Targum Yonatan – The Mashiach will be descended from the tribe of Yehuda (Judah), since all future Jewish kings will be born from descendants of this tribe.

The sceptre shall not depart from Yehuda, or the ruler's staff from between his feet, until the arrival of Shiloh [Mashiach]; and the nations shall submit to him.	לא-יסור שֵׁבֶט מִיְהוּדָה, וּמַחְקֶק מִבֵּין רַגְלָיו, עַד כִּי-יָבֹא שִׁילֹה, וְלוֹ יִקָּהֶת עַמִּים.
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Targum Yonatan There will never cease to be kings and rulers from the House of Yehuda, and teachers of Torah to thousands of his children until the King Mashiach comes [who will also be one of his descendants].	לא פסקין מלכין ושלטיין מדבית יהודה וספרין מאלפי אוריתא מזרעה עד זמן די ייתי מלכא משיחא.
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2. Abarbanel, Commentary on Yechezkel 34:24 – The Mashiach will be a descendant of King David or a reincarnation of him.

“My servant David” – The Mashiach will be a descendant of David... However, the Kabbalists, who regard reincarnation as a fundamental principle of Judaism, say that the Mashiach will be a reincarnation of King David himself.	ודוד עבדי – ...מלך המשיח יהיה מזרע דוד ... אבל בעלי הקבלה שקיימו וקבלו דעת גלגול נפשות, אמרו שמלך המשיח יהיה דוד עצמו כי הנה נפש דוד תתגלגל במלך המשיח.
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There are numerous Jewish families today that can trace their ancestry back to King David. For example, the Maharal of Prague (1512-1609) was able to trace his lineage to Rav Hai Gaon (939-1038), who in turn was known to descend from King David. And there are numerous families that still trace their lineage to the Maharal (Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan, Handbook of Jewish Thought, Vol. II, 25:3).

In the next source, we reflect on the deeper meaning of the Mashiach being a reincarnation of King David.

3. Rabbi Reuven Leuchter, Meshivat Nefesh on Nefesh HaChaim 1:20 (Gloss) – Mashiach will embody the ideal creation of man, and will therefore be a “reincarnation” of King David’s unique soul.

What is being explained here is that Mashiach is the embodiment of the ideal creation of man. This is not something that can be said about just any individual. Even though all people are created in line with the original ideal, nevertheless that ideal is not actualized in them. As such, there is no one who so greatly resembles the ideal creation of man that one would be able to recognize it by studying him. But King David perfected and sanctified himself in actual practice to such an extent that one could look at him and understand G-d’s purpose in the creation of man. As such, one could say that he brought to the fore the ideal of “Adam.” And our righteous Mashiach will actualize the root of this soul to the fullest extent...	נתבאר כאן שמשיח הוא התגשמות הרעיון של בריאת האדם, וזהו דבר שבדרך כלל אי אפשר לומר על אדם פרטי. כי אע"פ שכל בני האדם נבראו מכח אתו רעיון, עדיין הרעיון הוא הרבה יותר נעלה מהאדם בפועל, ואין בן אנוש שהרעיון משתקף בו עד שניתן להכיר על ידי התבוננות בו מה היה הרעיון בבריאת האדם. אבל דוד המלך השלים וקידש את עצמו, והוציא את שורש הנשמה שלו לפועל, עד שמהתבוננות בו היה אפשר להכיר ולהבין מה היה הרעיון של הקב"ה בבריאת האדם. לכן אפשר לומר שהוא הוציא לפועל את הרעיון של 'אדם'. ומשיח צדקינו יוציא את שורש נשמתו לפועל לגמרי...
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Part C. The Sprouting of Salvation

Why does this prayer use the term “sprouting” in regard to salvation? Since we are essentially asking G-d to make it happen, why such a strange expression that seems to imply that it will happen by itself?

1. Midrash Shocher Tov, Tehillim 18 – The redemption will come bit by bit.

Rabbi Yudan said: The redemption of the Jews will not happen all at once but rather little by little. What does it mean that G-d grows [salvation]? It grows slowly before the Jews who are presently steeped in great troubles. Were the redemption to come all at once they would not be able to handle such a powerful salvation amidst these great troubles. Therefore, it comes bit by bit, growing gradually.	א"ר יודן לפי שאין הגאולה של אומה זו באה בבת אחת אלא קימעא קימעא ומהו מגדיל שהיא מתגדלת והולכת לפני ישראל לפי שהן עכשיו שרויין בצרות גדולות ואם תבא הגאולה בבת אחת אינן יכולין לסבול ישועה גדולה שהיא בא מתוך צרות גדולות לכך היא באה קימעא קימעא ומתגדלת והולכת.
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While many of the features of pre-Messianic era seem to be coming to fruition in our time – such as the ingathering of exiles and a renaissance in Torah learning – nevertheless the actual redemption process will only truly be initiated by the Mashiach himself.

2. Rabbi Zev Leff, Shemoneh Esrei, pg. 335 – Redemption does not begin to sprout until the coming of the Mashiach.

The period of Mashiach can occur as a slow process that will start with his being assumed Mashiach, continue with his building the Beis HaMikdash and gathering in the exiles, and finally perfecting the world. This is the concept of Chazal that the redemption will come slowly as the dawn (Yerushalmi, Berachot 1: 1). Just as the dawn comes in gradually, so too does the redemption.

There are some who interpret this statement as implying that the redemption happens gradually and culminates with Mashiach. They refer to various events as being the beginning of *geulah* (redemption), that it is the "*reishit tzemichat geulateinu*" - the beginning of the sprouting of our redemption. I heard personally from Rav Moshe Feinstein that this entire concept is erroneous. Redemption does not come gradually and culminate with Mashiach. Redemption does not begin until Mashiach proclaims himself. Until that point Exile is in force, even if Jews have reclaimed the Land of Israel and settled it. It is only after someone claims to be Mashiach that the redemption will then come gradually as the dawn, until Mashiach finally gathers in the exiles, builds the Mikdash, fights the necessary wars, and finally influences and corrects the entire world to serve Hashem with one clear voice.

Part D. Waiting for Mashiach

A major facet of Mashiach is the idea that we not only believe he will come eventually, but rather that we consciously anticipate his arrival. Why is it so important to always be waiting for Mashiach?

1. Rambam, Thirteen Principles of Faith, Principle 12 [expressed as a personal creed] – Belief in the coming of the Mashiach means that one awaits his imminent arrival.

I believe with complete faith in the coming of the Mashiach, and even though he may delay, nonetheless I anticipate every day that he will come.	אני מאמין באמונה שלמה בביאת המשיח, ואף על פי שיתמהמה, עם כל זה אחכה לו בכל יום שיבוא:
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2. Talmud Bavli, Shabbat 31a – In the next world we will be asked whether or not we longed for the salvation Mashiach will bring.

Rava said: At the time a person is brought in for judgment [in the next world], he is asked... did you hope for salvation?	אמר רבא: בשעה שמכניסין אדם לדין אומרים לו... צפית לישועה?
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Interestingly, the Talmud seems to imply just the opposite, that Mashiach will only come once we have given up on him ever arriving!

3. Talmud Bavli, Sanhedrin 97a – Mashiach only comes to those who don't wait.

The Son of David [i.e. Mashiach] will not come until... people have despaired of redemption, for it is written, “there is nothing left to keep or abandon” (Devarim 32:36), as if to say Israel will have neither supporter nor helper. This view concurs with that of Rabbi Zeira, who, whenever he chanced upon scholars engaged in calculating the time of Mashiach’s coming, would say to them: I beg of you, do not postpone it, for it has been taught: Three things only come when the mind is diverted from them: Mashiach, a lost object and a scorpion.	אין בן דוד בא... עד שיתייאשו מן הגאולה. שנאמר ואפס עצור ועזוב - כביכול אין סומך ועוזר לישראל. כי הא דרבי זירא, כי הוה משכח רבנן דמעסקי ביה, אמר להו: במטותא, בעינא מנייכו לא תרחקוה. דתנינא: שלשה באין בהיסח הדעת, אלו הן: משיח, מציאה, ועקרב.
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4. Rabbi Yaakov Kamenetzky, Emet L'Yaakov, Parshat Ha'azinu 32:36 – Salvation will only come when the Jews have given up their hope for a socio-political redemption.

In the Talmud (Sanhedrin 97a) we learn that the redeemer shall not come to the Jewish people until they have lost all hope, as if there were no support or help for the Jews. This statement needs clarification, for how could we presume that we are supposed to forget about one of Rambam’s thirteen fundamentals of faith – hoping for salvation?	הנה בסנהדרין [דף צ"ז ע"א] ילפינן מהכא שאין בן דוד בא עד שיתייאשו מן הגאולה כביכול אין סומך ועוזר לישראל, ועיי"ש. והנה מאמר חז"ל זה טעון ביאור, וכי תנאי הוא שחס ושלום ישתכח עיקר א' מהשלש עשרה עיקרים, והלא הרמב"ם מנה תקות הגאולה בין העיקרים.
The meaning behind this statement is that as long as the Jews hope for salvation by natural means – that is, that the nations of the world will have mercy upon us and let us build a nation-state, or the like – then the redemption will surely not come. For the [feigned] kindness of	אבל הכוונה בזה הוא שכל זמן שכלל ישראל מצפה לגאולה שתבוא באופן טבעי, והיינו שירחמו עלינו אומות העולם ויתנו לנו איזה מקום לבנות לנו מולדת וכדומה, ודאי לא תבוא הגאולה, כי חסד לאומים חטאת ובאמת שנאיים אנחנו מכל יושבי תבל, ורק אם נתיאש לגמרי מאשליות כאלו ונבין כי אין לנו לישען אלא על אבינו

the nations is sinful, since they hate us more than any other people on earth. Only when we give up such illusions and understand that the only one we have to rely on is our Father in Heaven, then the Mashiach will come and truly redeem us.	שבשמים אז יבוא בן דוד ויגאלנו גאולה אמיתית, והבן.
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5. Rabbi Yaakov Weinberg, Fundamentals and Faith, pg. 116 – Without Mashiach, life is not complete.

<p>In his Commentary to the Mishnah, the Rambam says, "Whoever doubts or minimizes his [the Mashiach's] importance denies the Torah that attests to it." Instead of the need to await his coming, which the Rambam discussed in Mishneh Torah, here he warns against minimizing the Mashiach's importance. It would seem, then, that "awaiting him" should be understood as attributing to him so much importance that one is aware of missing something, of lacking something every moment of one's life. It is not enough to know and believe in his coming; one must also feel and understand what it means not to have him in our world.</p> <p>A world without the Mashiach is a world of exile, where Jews find themselves dispersed amongst many nations. It is a world where even in the Land of Israel, Jews are subjected to the whims and values of other nations. It is a world in which terrible barriers created by spiritual apathy deter man from coming close to the Almighty, and where the opportunities to approach Him and to experience His presence in His Temple are gone. Once one appreciates that the meaning of life is determined by how close one comes to the Creator, the loss of His presence becomes an acute, intolerable pain, a cancer, which eats away at man's spiritual core, which can only be anesthetized by distracting ourselves through all kinds of self-delusionary pleasures. In doing so, mankind has become callous and his senses have become dull to the ultimate pleasure this relationship would offer.</p>	
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6. Rambam, Introduction to Perek Chelek (Talmud Bavli, Sanhedrin, Chapter 10) – We look forward to a time when all the impediments to closeness to G-d will be removed.

We do not long and hope for the days of Mashiach because of an increase of productivity and wealth which may occur then, or that we may ride on horses and drink wine to the accompaniment of song, as some confused people think. The prophets and the pious ones looked forward to the days of the Mashiach and yearned for them because then the righteous will be gathered together in fellowship, and because goodness and wisdom will prevail. They desired it also because of the righteousness and the abundant justice of the Messianic king, because of the salutary influence of his unprecedented wisdom, and because of his nearness to G-d...	ואין אנו מתאוים ומקווים לימות המשיח לרוב התבואות והעושר, ולא שנרכב על סוסים, ולא לשתות יין במיני הזמר, כמו נְשִׁמְחִשְׁבִּים מבולבלי הדעת. אבל התאוה הנביאים והחסידים ימות המשיח, וְרִבְתָּה תשוקתם אֲלֵיהֶם – לְמָה שִׁיחֶיה בּוּ מְקִיבוֹן הַצְדִּיקִים, והנהגת הטובה והחכמה, וְצִדְקַת המלך ורוב יִשְׁרוֹ, והפלגת חכמתו וקִרְבוֹתוֹ אל האלהים...
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Key Themes of מלכות בית דוד – Davidic Reign.

- Belief in the coming of the Mashiach is one of the fundamentals of Judaism because it affirms the basic belief that G-d is driving the world toward a perfected state.
- Mashiach will be a direct descendant of King David. He will also embody the unique virtues of King David's lofty soul.
- We speak of the redemption "sprouting," because it is not something that will happen all of a sudden. And even though it seems that features of it are already coming into place, in reality only Mashiach himself can initiate the process of true redemption.
- We don't just believe that Mashiach will eventually come; we are supposed to consciously anticipate his imminent arrival. This anticipation stems from the awareness that life is not complete as long as we lack the kind of relationship with G-d that we will have once Mashiach comes.

Berachah 16. שמע קולינו – Acceptance of Prayer

שמע קולינו ה' אלהינו, חוס ורחם עלינו, וקבל ברחמים ובכבוד את תפילותינו, כי אל שומע תפילות ותחנונים אתה ומלפניך מלכנו ריקם אל תשיבנו, כי אתה שומע תפילות עמך ישראל ברחמים. ברוך אתה ה' שומע תפילה.

Hear our voice, L-rd our G-d, pity and be compassionate on us, and accept – with compassion and favor – our prayer, for You are G-d Who hears prayers and supplications. From before Yourself, our King, turn us not away empty-handed. For You hear the prayer of Your people Israel with compassion. Blessed are You, G-d, Who hears prayers.

With this prayer we conclude the thirteen middle berachot. We have asked for many things, for ourselves, for others, and for the Jewish people. We now ask G-d to heed these prayers and grant us any other requests we wish to make at this point.

Part A. The Catchall Prayer

In this prayer we ask that all our prayers be answered. It is here that we can insert any of the personal things we feel were not covered by any of the previous berachot.

1. Tur, Orach Chaim 119:1 (based on Talmud Bavli, Avodah Zarah 7b) – Shema Koleinu is the catchall berachah.

A person may ask for anything he needs in the berachah of 'Hear our Voice', because it encapsulates all requests.	שואל אדם צרכיו בשומע תפלה שהיא כוללת כל הבקשות.
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2. Rabbi Yehonatan Eibenschutz, Ya'arot Devash, pg. 11

Shema Koleinu, etc. In this prayer you should put everything before G-d to pray to Him for all needs, great or small – do not refrain from praying to G-d for anything, be it a soul-mate for yourself or one of your children; pray to G-d for good merchandise; pray to G-d that He grant you success and lead you upon the path of honesty. The general rule is that there is nothing in daily life for which one cannot pray to G-d and ask for success or advancement... For anything that you want to pray, do so in your own language, even if you will stammer or not speak in proper Hebrew – it is as precious to G-d as if you prayed expressively, clearly and articulately... By virtue of this prayer, G-d will hear our voices and our prayer will be effective, because this prayer will certainly be sincere and not just lip service where the mouth speaks while the heart is elsewhere.	שמע קולינו וכו' בו ישים כל מגמותיו לה' להתפלל לו על כל צרכיו אפילו דבר קטן או גדול לא יבצר דבר מה שלא יתפלל בו לה' אם צריך לעשות שידך א"ע או בנו ובנותיו יתפלל לה' לסחורה יתפלל לה' שיצליחו ויוליכו בדרך הישר. כללו של דבר אין דבר מה שרצונו לעשות בו ביום מה שלא יתפלל לה' להצליחו ולהוליכו בדרך... ועל כל ענין מה שעוסק יתפלל בלשונו ואף כי לשונו לשון עלג ואינו יכול להתפלל בלשון עברי כראוי הוא חביב לפני הקב"ה כאלו הרבה להתפלל בלשון רחבה שפה ברורה ונעימה... ועל ידי תפלה זו ישמע ה' לקולנו ויצא לנו תועלת כי תפלה זו ודאי בכונה ולא יהי' פיו ולשונו מדבר ולבו בל עמו.
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Part B. The Logic of Prayer

Judaism maintains that G-d is omniscient and omnipotent: He knows everything and can do anything. So it stands to reason that He knows what we want and could have given it to us already. Why then do we petition G-d for our needs? Do we expect to change His mind?

The answer is that expressing our needs to G-d is a valuable means of developing a personal relationship with Him. Even if we cannot change Him, perhaps through the act of prayer we change ourselves!

1. Rabbi Shimshon Pincus, Siddur Hatefillah, p. 344 – Beseeching G-d helps us to connect to Him in a personal way.

The goal of prayer is not the requests [that we ask from G-d] themselves but rather the connection to and relationship with G-d. However, man's requests, needs and wants are the strongest means [for us] to connect with G-d: we ask, receive, and give thanks.	תכלית התפילה אינה הבקשות כשלעצמן, אלא החיבור והשייכות עם הקב"ה. אלא שהבקשות והצרכים והרצונות של האדם הם האמצעי החזק ביותר להתקשר עם הקב"ה-אנו מבקשים מקבלים ומודים.
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Yet the question remains: If He hasn't given us what we want yet, He has a good reason. Who are we to try to change His mind?

2. Rabbi Abraham Twerski, Twerski on Prayer – Prayer is supposed to change us, not G-d.

One of the problems that many theologians have grappled with is: "Why and how does prayer work?" If a sick person prays for recovery, he is assuming that G-d has allowed him to become sick. Is he to believe that his prayer can make G-d change His mind?

One of the answers given is that there is a constant outpouring of Divine benevolence to the world. Just as the sun radiates light, yet there are areas of darkness in enclosures where the sunlight does not reach, so does the Divine benevolence not reach where there are barriers that obstruct it. These barriers are a person's actions that are contrary to the will of G-d.

Genuine, sincere prayer brings a person into a closer relationship with G-d. The barriers to the Divine benevolence are thereby removed or circumvented, and the person can then receive this benevolence. The blessing and improvement in the person's health is not the result of a change in G-d's will, but of a change in the status of the recipient.

Genuine prayer brings about a transformation in a person. The newly emerging person can be receptive of the Divine benevolence to which the former person was impervious.

It always behooves us to ask G-d for our needs even while knowing that He has withheld them until now. Prayer is intrinsically an act of recognizing G-d in our lives, and when we do that we open the gates of blessing.

3. Rabbi Reuven Leuchter, Prayer: Creating Dialogue with Hashem, pg. 17, footnote 3 – It is G-d's will that goodness be generated through prayer.

Although G-d wants our good, He decreed for a reason known only to Him that this good would only emerge as a result of our requesting it, of our praying with the full recognition that He wants to bestow good on us in every possible respect. This is made clear in the Torah's account of Creation: "Now any tree of the field was not yet on the earth and any herb of the field had not yet sprouted... and there was no man to work the soil" (Bereishit/Genesis 2:4-5). Rashi expounds on this verse that there was no one to recognize the goodness of rain. When Adam came and recognized that rain is necessary for the world, he prayed for rain. Rain came down, and then the trees and vegetation sprouted. Certainly, G-d does not want a barren world; rather it is His will that goodness be generated specifically through prayer.

Part C. Hear our Voice

1. Rabbi Avrohom Chaim Feuer, Shemoneh Esrei, pg. 228 – We're asking G-d to hear the sound of our voice, not just the words.

Iyun Tefillah explains that the term קוֹלֵנוּ, *our voice*, does not refer to the sounds of prayer, because *Shemoneh Esrei* should be whispered so quietly that it is inaudible even to the person standing at the supplicant's side. As we read: "Now Chana prayed in her heart, only her lips moved, but her voice was not heard" (I Samuel 1:13). Rather, we refer here to the inner voice of the soul, which says, "I am distressed and confused. My thoughts are in disarray. More important than the *words* of my prayer – because I can't express myself adequately – hear the anguish and suffering in my voice. Hear the sincerity with which I pour out my heart to You, for only You, O G-d, are my salvation!"

2. Rabbi Shimon Schwab, On Prayer, pg. 500 – The way a prayer is said conveys the message more than the words.

Hear our voice, L-rd, our G-d. We do not say, "Hear our tefillah." Rather, we ask G-d to hear our voice. And "voice" could not mean the sound of our tefillah, because the *Shemoneh Esrei* is said quietly. Rather, the voice of our tefillah refers to the intent and thought that we put into our tefillah. We ask G-d to listen not merely to the words we say but to our intent while we say them. It is the "voice," the thought and emphasis, which one puts into the words of tefillah that give them their true meaning.

An analogy for this would be a son who sends a terse telegram to his father: "Father, send me money." Upon receipt of this seemingly audacious note, the father becomes very upset and goes to his Rabbi to complain about this inconsiderate and brash son, and asks him for guidance in dealing with him. Whereupon the Rabbi asks to see the telegram. Upon reading it, he tells the father, "You did not read this properly. Here is what it says." And in a trembling and pleading voice, the Rabbi imitates the tone of the words of the young son to his father: "Father ... send me money!" Upon hearing the Rabbi's rendition of his son's tearful and pleading request for money, the father says, "I cannot refuse such a heartrending appeal from my son to help him with some money."

Similarly, we ask G-d to hear the tone and meaning that we have placed into the words of our tefillah. The words "Hear our voice, L-rd our G-d, pity and be compassionate on us" take on a completely different meaning if they are said pleadingly and with supplication rather than if they are merely "rattled off" as if one were reading a newspaper.

Key Themes of שמע קולינו – Acceptance of Prayer.

- This berachah is an opportunity to petition G-d in our own language for anything we feel that we need. Such prayer is particularly beloved by G-d, because it issues from the depths of our hearts.
- We petition our needs before G-d even though we know that He knows what we want, because the act of prayer itself draws us closer to Him. Perhaps the strengthened relationship with G-d will help us become worthy of what we seek.
- In this berachah we focus on the tone of the prayer more closely than the words while we ask G-d to hear the emotion in our voices.

Chapter Three

The Concluding Berachot of Thankfulness

The final three berachot of the Amidah are called by the Rambam “Hoda’ah,” the section of thanks. This classification is based on the Talmudic directive that after petitioning G-d with our requests we then take leave by expressing our gratitude. Interestingly, only the middle of these three berachot focuses exclusively on thanking G-d. The first berachah asks G-d to restore the Temple service and the last berachah asks G-d for a host of blessings, most notably: peace. In this section, we begin by explaining how these three berachot form a unit of thanks to G-d, and then we will focus on each of the berachot individually.

Introduction to the Concluding Berachot

In the last three berachot we are to be like a servant taking leave of his master.

1. Talmud Bavli, Berachot 34a – The Amidah is arranged like a servant addressing his master.

Rabbi Yehuda said: A man should never petition for his needs in either the first three blessings or in the last three, but rather in the middle ones. For Rabbi Chanina said: In the first blessings he resembles a servant who is offering tribute to his master; in the middle ones he resembles a servant who is requesting a present from his master; in the last ones he resembles a servant who has received a gift from his master and takes his leave.	אמר רב יהודה: לעולם אל ישאל אדם צרכיו לא בשלש ראשונות, ולא בשלש אחרונות, אלא באמצעיות. דאמר רבי חנינא: ראשונות - דומה לעבד שמסדר שבח לפני רבו. אמצעיות - דומה לעבד שמבקש פרס מרבו. אחרונות - דומה לעבד שקבל פרס מרבו ונפטר והולך לו.
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2. Rambam (Maimonides), Hilchot Tefillah (The Laws of Prayer) 1:4 – The last three berachot are categorized as “thanks.”

The first three [blessings] are praises of G-d and the last three are thanksgiving. The intermediate [blessings] contain requests for all general categories of wishes of each and every person and the needs of the whole community.	שלש ראשונות שבח לה' ושלש אחרונות הודיה, ואמצעיות יש בהן שאלת כל הדברים שהן כמו אבות לכל חפצי איש ואיש ולצרכי הציבור כולן
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As we noted above, only the middle one of these last three berachot is specifically about thanks, while the other two actually do petition requests from G-d. Why then are they grouped as “thanks” by Rambam and considered as “taking leave” by the Talmud?

3. Rabbeinu Asher (Rosh), Berachot 5:21 – Requests for communal needs is a form of praise.

Rabbi Yehuda said: A man should never petition for his needs in either the first three blessings or in the last three. Rabbeinu Tam and Rabbeinu Chananel explain that this limitation refers	אמר רב יהודה לא ישאל אדם צרכיו לא בשלש ראשונות ולא בשלש אחרונות ופר"ת ור"ח ז"ל דהיינו דוקא בצרכי יחיד אבל בצרכי רבים שרי דהא כולהו ג' אחרונות צרכי צבור נינהו ועם מה שעבד מסדר שבחו לרבו יכול לשאל
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specifically to requests for the needs of the individual; however, it is still permissible to petition for the needs of the community, as we see that the last three berachot are filled with requests for communal needs. When the servant is offering praises to his master he can make requests for communal needs, because it is praise and honor to the master [to recognize that] the masses need him.	צרכי צבור דשבה וכבוד הוא לרב שהרבים צריכין לו.
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4. Rabbi Avrohom Chaim Feuer, Shemoneh Esrei, pg. 238 – Asking G-d for communal needs is indeed praising Him, because it expresses our total dependency upon Him.

In a deeper sense this teaches us that there is a fundamental difference between thanks offered to man and thanks expressed to G-d. After receiving assistance from his fellow man, the best thanks the recipient can offer is to say: “Thank you! You have been so helpful and generous that I no longer need your help.” With G-d, the opposite is true. The more one receives from G-d, the more one recognizes how utterly dependent he is on G-d, not just for the special needs he requested but even for the simplest needs that he always took for granted. In this sense, the sincerest form of gratitude and praise to G-d is to immediately request more of Him.

Therefore, only the middle blessing of this section solely expresses thanksgiving: We gratefully thank You. It is sandwiched by requests for G-d’s help, demonstrating that our deepest gratitude is that we can always depend upon Him.

Berachah 17. עבודה (Avodah) – Temple Service

רצה יהוה אלהינו בעמך ישראל ובתפלתם והושב את העבודה לדביר ביתך. ואשי ישראל ותפלתם,
באהבה תקבל ברכון. ותהי לרצון תמיד עבודת ישראל עמך: ותתנונה עינינו בשוכך לציון ברחמים: ברוך
אתה יהוה הממזיר שכינתו לציון:

Be favorable, L-rd our G-d, toward Your people Israel and their prayer, and restore the service to the Holy of Holies of Your Temple. Accept with love and favor the fire-offerings of Israel and their prayer, and may the service of Your people Israel always be favorable to You. May our eyes behold Your return to Zion in compassion. Blessed are You, G-d, Who restores His Presence to Zion.

This berachah is a prayer for the restoration of the Temple service in the Beit HaMikdash. It makes reference to sacrifices, prayer, and the dwelling of the Divine Presence. Having asked G-d in the previous berachah to hear our prayers, we now go a step further and request to be able to serve G-d in the most desirable manner possible. Our hope is that by doing so, we will be worthy of the open revelation of spirituality and connection to G-d.

We explained above in Chapter One (The Introductory Berachot of Praise), Berachah 1 – (The Avot), Part B, that the institution of structured prayer was based on two sources: 1) the establishment of the prayers by the Avot, and 2) replacing the *Tamid* (continual, daily) sacrifices with prayer after the destruction of the Second Temple. We will now explain how the latter is central to prayer.

Part A. Drawing Closer to G-d through Sacrifices

There is no way around it. This berachah asks for the restoration of animal sacrifices in the Temple. There is perhaps no area of the Torah that so challenges our “modern sensibilities” as that of sacrifices. Centuries ago the Kuzari stated that had the Torah not legislated such a thing, we never would have imagined that slaughtering and offering an animal would bring us closer to G-d. But closeness is what it is all about.

1. Rabbi Noson Weisz, Prayer Works, pg. 109 – The Tamid sacrifices are the second pillar of structured prayer.

The Amidah, says the Talmud, was “established as a replacement of the Tamid sacrifices.” This is the second pillar upon which the institution of prayer stands. Tamid, which means “constant,” describes a sacrifice that began at Mount Sinai and continued twice daily – except during the 70 years of Babylonian exile – until the destruction of the Second Temple. It was the first sacrifice brought each morning and the last one brought in the evening. Thus, in its name and in its execution, the Tamid sacrifice represents the constancy of our connection to G-d. Tradition teaches that it is responsible for maintaining the constancy of Creation.

What, then, maintained Creation before the Tamid was instituted? The Talmud (Pesachim 118a) explains that there were 26 generations between Adam and Moses, during which time G-d supported and fed the world out of pure benevolence. Because He had not yet given the Torah, people had no means by which to earn this benevolence. Rav Yitzchak Hutner, zt”l, explains that they were like the poor man who has no skills or ability to earn a living. He must be given everything.

However, once G-d gave the Jewish people the Torah, a new dynamic was established. Then they were like a poor man to whom one gives a business loan which allows him to start a business and become self-supporting. Even though he will have to pay the money back and work for his income, this method is far superior to the first, for the man will not be forced to beg for a hand-out each day.

In the same manner, as soon as the Jewish people developed the spiritual skills to enter into G-d's "family business," we were able to earn our own way in the world by exerting our own effort. The groundwork laid by the Patriarchs gave our nation the spiritual "skill" to receive the Torah, which became our mission and our life's work.

2. Ibid. – A sacrifice brought us closer to G-d by increasing our recognition of His sustenance of the world.

The word for service in Hebrew is *avodah*, but in the parlance of Jewish spirituality, this word is reserved exclusively for Divine service. That is because Divine service is the "ultimate" work, for it maintains the world. Bringing sacrifices – is considered an *avodah par excellence*.

Maintaining the world is a ceaseless endeavor, which was accomplished in the Temple times through the Tamid. When the Temple was destroyed, the Tamid sacrifice had to be replaced, for G-d was not prepared to revert to supporting the world out of pure benevolence. The Jewish people still required an *avodah* of some kind in order to merit the maintenance of the world. To fill the void left in the absence of the Tamid, the Sages commanded the Jewish people to recite the Amidah. The service of the Altar was replaced by service of the heart.

How can the spoken words of a prayer replace the sacrifice of an animal? The answer lies in understanding the function the sacrifice fulfilled. In Hebrew, a sacrifice is called a *korban*, from the root word *karov*, near. A *korban* brings us nearer to G-d by causing us to recognize that G-d gives us the world anew each day.

3. Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, Vayikra (Leviticus) 1:2 – G-d's closeness, achieved by the sacrifices, is the ultimate good.

The purpose of every sacrifice is closeness to G-d: "They will seek the closeness of G-d" (Yeshaya/Isaiah 58:2)... For closeness to G-d is the only yardstick by which to measure the truth of one's worldview and one's well-being. There, in the holy chambers of the Temple, it becomes clear that one's spiritual and physical well-being will only develop out of closeness to G-d under the auspices of His law – and that this is the destiny of one's purpose... There, the only good is found in closeness to G-d. Furthermore, only closeness to G-d is truly good for man: "G-d's nearness is my good" (Tehillim/Psalms 73:28).

4. Rabbi Baruch Leff, Forever His Students, p. 90 – Sacrifice is the ultimate expression of closeness with G-d.

Sacrifices are an outgrowth of a tremendous drive to serve and relate to a higher power. A man who really loves his wife cannot simply tell her that he loves her. He feels compelled to buy her flowers or chocolates to express his love and to give something of himself to her. So it is with relating to G-d. Because we are physical beings, we are driven to show our love and passion for G-d in some physical form. And this giving of oneself to G-d must be in an ultimate sense. I want to give my

entire existence, my whole life to G-d. I express this with the offering of my animal's life. This is why the word for sacrifice in Hebrew is "Korban," meaning closeness.

5. Rabbi Avraham Edelstein, Commentary on Sefer Vayikra, Ner Le'Elef, pp. 10-12 – Sacrifices made a huge impact on the individuals who brought them.

When someone brought a korban (sacrifice), he would do so from the best of his possessions – an expensive domestic animal like a prize bull or sheep. By showing that the best of what he has really belongs to G-d, the person was educating himself that he has to serve Him with all that he has. He would be showing his recognition that everything ultimately connects back to G-d...

This dedication of his physical possessions served as a springboard to his dedication of all of his faculties, character traits, creativity and uniqueness to increasing spirituality, to revealing the Oneness of G-d in the world. That blood on the altar – that ought to be my blood, my very life on that altar. But G-d commands that I serve Him with my life, not with my death. Since the time of the binding of Isaac, I am commanded to bring a korban in place of myself, and to learn from that the dedication of self that is required. The arm of that animal, that really should be my arm, and I hereby dedicate my arm to serving only G-d. The heart, the legs, the body – all call upon my body parts to be that daily offering in my work, my family life, my joys and sorrows...

As far as this explanation goes, the Kuzari warns us that intellectual reasoning alone will never give us the full picture of the closeness to G-d which the korbanot (or, for that matter, many other mitzvot) gave. The korbanot are G-d's will – and doing His will connects us with elements of spirituality which our human intellects can never anticipate. Do and you will see. There were giants of the spirit (from the first man through to the prophets at the time of the Temple) who testified to the deep spiritual value of the offerings – a testimony arising out of their actual sacrificing rather than any theoretical discussion or ideas.

6. Rabbi Noson Weisz, Prayer Works, pg. 110 – By offering a sacrifice, we acknowledge that our life is a gift from G-d.

A korban, like all the offerings required in the Torah, forces us to engage our hearts, minds, and limbs in the essential lesson that everything belongs to G-d. When, for instance, a farmer must give his tithes, donating the first ten percent of his harvest to the Kohen, the Levite, and the poor, he teaches his own hand to let go of the fruits of his labors. He demonstrates to himself that even though he tilled the fields, planted the seeds, tended the crops, and harvested them, he would have nothing for his work had G-d not made his crops grow. It is all G-d's, and the sacrifice shows this by giving the first, thrilling fruits of one's labor to those whom G-d has chosen to receive them. In doing so, we implicitly declare that even the part we keep comes to us from G-d's table.

The same principle applies to life in general. Life is a gift from the Almighty that we receive anew each day. When the Temple stood, we were able to powerfully express our gratitude for this gift and vividly sense it as a direct endowment from G-d. We reached this lofty state of spiritual awareness through the same means as we described above – by giving a certain portion of the gift back to G-d, thereby acknowledging that it is His in its entirety.

How could we give G-d back any portion of our life force without sacrificing our own lives? We did it by using a living, breathing, fiercely alive proxy – a domesticated animal. In truth, the pulsating life force that energizes us is not much different from that which animates domesticated animals. In Hebrew, they are both called the *nefesh*. Rife with overpowering urges, drives, ambitions, and desires,

this life force sometimes causes us to forget that we are G-d's creatures, sent into G-d's world to accomplish the tasks He has set before us. The gift of life then loses its connection to the Giver.

Since we could not solve this problem by putting our own life force on the altar, we did the next-best thing. We invested our energy in work, through which we acquired wealth, from which we contributed the *machatzi shekel* (half shekel) offering each year to the Temple. This money, in turn, paid for the twice-daily Tamid sacrifice.

Part B. The Divine Presence

During the third day of the Six Day War in 1967, Israeli soldiers finally burst through into the Old City of Jerusalem and were able to fight their way to the area of the Western Wall. As soldiers both old and young fell upon the Wall, they wept with emotion, all the while kissing and caressing with awe the last remaining segment of the Temple. This, in large part, was what they had been fighting for, this holy place to which Jews had not been allowed to come for close to two decades. Now they, at the high cost of many soldiers killed and wounded, had captured it from the enemy's hands. The picture of those anxious weeping soldiers at the Western Wall is etched forever in the minds of those who saw it first-hand.

Standing back from those huddled close to the Wall, were two soldiers who came from a non-observant kibbutz. They had no religious background whatsoever, and thus the holiness and significance of the place was lost on them. They looked around, overwhelmed by emptiness, and then suddenly one of them began to cry uncontrollably.

The second soldier, surprised by this sudden outburst, turned to the first and said, "למה אתה בוכה? – Why are you crying?"

The first soldier looked up as tears rolled down his cheeks and replied sadly, "אני בוכה על מה שאני לא בוכה – I cry because I don't know what there is to cry about."

(From Rabbi Paysach Krohn, Around the Maggid's Table, ArtScroll Publications, p. 105)

In the conclusion of this berachah we ask for the restoration of the Divine Presence to the Temple. Having never experienced such a Presence, the concept of missing it is hard to relate to. What does it mean to us that we lack such a Presence these days?

1. Yalkut Shimoni, Eichah (Lamentations) 996 – The destruction of the Temple means that there is no longer a dwelling place for the palpable Presence of G-d (*Shechinah*).

When they burned [the Temple], the Holy One, Blessed Be He, said, "I no longer have a resting place in the land. It is no longer mine. Rather, I will remove my Presence from it."

כיון ששרפוהו אמר הקב"ה שוב אין לי מושב בארץ כל הארץ לא שלי הוא אלא אסלק שכינתי ממנה.

2. Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe, Alei Shur, Vol. II, p. 407 – The withdrawal of the Divine Presence leaves the world and its inhabitants bereft of the Presence of their Creator.

The destruction of the Temple constitutes the destruction of the world, in the respect that there is not even one pure and holy corner for G-d's Presence to rest in.

חורבן בית המקדש הוא חורבן העולם. עולם נחרב הוא שאין בו אף פינה אחת מטהרה ומקודשת להשגת השכינה.

3. Rabbi Shraga Simmons, Eye of Jerusalem, from www.aish.com – Without the Temple we lose the awareness that G-d is interested in this world.

The Temple was where every Jew, no matter what his situation, could meet G-d. G-d did not want to be far away, He wanted to be next to His people and He wanted them to partake of His goodness.

Rabbi Avigdor Miller explains that the Temple was not merely a place of prayer and service, but was actually the dwelling place of G-d. “It was a stunning declaration of the principle that G-d’s interest is not in the vast distances of space and in the millions of star-worlds, but in man alone.”

This idea is alluded to in the following verse: “They shall make for Me a sanctuary and I will dwell among them” (Shemot/Exodus 25:8). The commentaries point out that the verse does not say, “I will dwell inside it,” but rather “among them.” What is the meaning of this unusual phrasing? The Temple was such a powerful reality that it inspired the Almighty’s Presence to dwell within each and every Jew.

4. Rabbi Avrohom Chaim Feuer, Shemoneh Esrei, pg. 242 – The Temple was a place of intimate connection and communication with G-d.

The inner sanctum of the Tabernacle and the Temple, the Holy of Holies, is also called the *Dvir* (see I Kings 6:20, 8:6,8 et al). *Iyun Tefillah* explains that the root of *Dvir* is *Dibur*, speech; i.e., the Holy of Holies is the private chamber, the conference room where G-d talks intimately to the representatives of the Jewish people, as it says: “And I will meet with you there [in the Holy of Holies] and I will speak with you...of all matters which I will command you to tell the Children of Israel” (Exodus 25:22). We plead with G-d to restore His original love for Israel so that we may enjoy the most intimate relationship with Him. We ask G-d to communicate with us directly and guide every aspect of our lives.

Part C. The Cosmic Significance of Sacrifices

In this first of the three concluding berachot we ask for the restoration of two things: sacrifices and G-d’s Presence in this world. What is the connection between the two? Let us explore further the idea that sacrifices bring more spirituality into the world.

1. Mishnah, Pirkei Avot (Ethics of the Fathers) 1:2 – The sacrificial service is one of the three things upon which the world subsists.

The world subsists upon three things: On the Torah, on *avodah* (service of G-d through sacrifices), and on deeds of kindness.

על שלשה דברים העולם עומד, על התורה ועל העבודה ועל גמילות חסדים.

Sacrifices are the force that maintains the existence of the world, drawing the “soul” of the world into its physical “body.” Sacrifices nourish the heaven-earth connection because they draw us close to G-d. This is the very essence of a *korban*, which, as stated above, means “drawing close.”

2. Rabbi Yehoshua Pfeffer, Beneath the Surface, Vayikra – Sacrifices are the inner nourishment of the world.

The Shechinah entered the *Mishkan* (Tabernacle), and later the Mikdash, like a soul enters the body. Of this combination we mention in the weekly blessings of Haftarah, “Have compassion upon

Zion, for it is the house of our lives.” Zion, the Temple where the Shechinah resides, is the *house of our lives*.

Yet, as the laws of the natural world dictate, the body-soul connection that defines life requires constant input. Without food, without obtaining the required nutrition by the act of eating, the connection weakens, and is finally severed. The same is true of the sacrificial order of the Mikdash. The Shechinah's presence depended on the input of our own service. The words of the Torah express this idea in the clearest possible terms: the Tamid (constant) offerings are described as “My sacrifice, My bread” (Numbers 28:2).

In the book of Exodus, which describes the redemption from Egypt and the final construction of the Mishkan, we were born our national birth, and the elevated life of the Mishkan was imbued within us. In the book of Vayikra, which follows immediately, we are taught how to live – most principally, the service of the Mishkan and the Mikdash that is required to maintain our inner life.

The idea that our sacrifices help to strengthen G-d's connection to the world means that the physical world, instead of being a barrier to the spiritual, can in fact become a vehicle for spirituality. That is why the sacrificial services performed in the Mishkan and Temple involved every part of the physical world.

3. Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin, Ruach Chaim, Ch. 3 (s.v. shnayim) – All the elements of the world are included in the sacrificial service.

The realms of the mineral, vegetable, animal and speaking [human] are all connected in the sacrifice. The salt [of the sacrifice] represents the mineral, the meal offering and the [wine] libations represent the vegetable, the sacrifice itself is the animal, and the officiating Kohen is the speaking.	חוברו כל הדומם, צומח, חי ומדבר, בקרבן. מלח – הוא הדומם, מנחה ונסכים – צומח, והוא עצמו [הקרבן] – חי, והכהן המקריב – הוא המדבר.
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Part D. Prayer as Service

This berachah makes mention not only of sacrifices, but also prayer: *Be favorable, L-rd our G-d, toward Your people Israel and their **prayer**, and restore the **service** to the Holy of Holies of Your Temple*. What is the connection between the two?

Without the Holy Temple in Jerusalem, we no longer have the opportunity to bring sacrifices to G-d or to perform the sacrificial rituals outlined in the Torah. But in lieu of sacrifices we have our prayer services.

1. Hosea 14:3 – Words replace the animals of sacrifice.

Take with you words, and turn to the L-rd. Say to Him, forgive all iniquity and receive us graciously, so we will offer the words of our lips instead of bulls.	קחו עמכם דברים ושובו אל ה' אמרו אליו כל תשא עון וקח טוב ונשלמה פרים שפתינו:
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2. Talmud Bavli, Taanit 2a – Prayer is a form of Temple service that can be done without sacrifices.

“And you shall love the L-rd, your G-d, and serve Him with all your heart” (Devarim/Deuteronomy 11:13). What is the service of the heart? This is prayer.	(דברים י"א:י"ג) לאהבה את ה' אלהיכם ולעבדו בכל לבבכם, איזו היא עבודה שהיא בלב - הוי אומר זו תפלה.
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How did prayer come to replace sacrifices? What do prayer and sacrifices have to do with each other?

3. Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, Koren Siddur, Introduction – Prayer did not come to replace sacrifice offerings after the destruction of the Temple; rather, it is the internal dimension of that very same sacrificial experience.

The transition from sacrifice to prayer was not a sudden development. A thousand years earlier, in his speech at the dedication of the Temple, King Solomon had emphasized prayer rather than sacrifice (I Kings 8:12-53). Through Isaiah, G-d had said, “My House shall be called <i>a house of prayer</i> for all peoples” (Is. 56:7). The prophet Hosea had said: “Take words with you and return to the L-rd... Instead of bulls we will pay [the offering of] our lips” (Hos. 14:3). Sacrifice was the external accompaniment of an inner act of heart and mind: thanksgiving, atonement, and so on. Therefore, though the outer act was no longer possible, the inner act remained. That is how sacrifice turned into prayer.

4. Rabbi Noson Weisz, Prayer Works, pg. 111 – Like the sacrifices, our prayers express that everything in the world comes from, and is guided by, G-d.

By placing the Tamid sacrifice on G-d’s Altar, we were able to reattach the life force within us to its Source. This act radically altered our spiritual awareness, enabling us to live a life of full faith in the love and guidance of the Almighty. By placing an animal on the Altar, we were able to symbolically place the world – our lives and all that our life force could create – on the Almighty’s table. Like the farmer with his <i>maaser</i> (tithes), we declared through our act that not only was the offering G-d’s, but that which remained with us was His as well. Thus, through the Tamid we sanctified, renewed and restored everything in the world.
The same function is fulfilled by the Amidah. Our prayers, like the sacrifices, state that everything in the world comes to us straight from G-d. By standing before Him in prayer, we are receiving directly from Him the new world He offers us each day. We are playing our part in a world of <i>Hashgachah Pratit</i> (Divine guidance), where everything we receive or experience is tailored to foster our personal spiritual growth and draw us into a closer connection to G-d.

5. Rabbi Chaim HaLevy Donin, To Pray as a Jew, pg. 98 – This berachah is a petition to G-d to favorably receive our prayer service.

The blessing of <i>Retzei</i> (Temple Service) specifically embodies the idea that prayer is now the sacrificial offering, the korban that we bring to G-d in lieu of the animal sacrifice. It is through prayer that we are now drawn closer to Him, and that was, after all, the main purpose of the korbanot. In former days, the Kohanim asked G-d to favorably receive the sacrifice. And so today, we ask that G-d favorably receive our service of prayer as our offering to Him (Talmud Yerushalmi, Berachot 4: 4). Although the first few words of Retzei seem to repeat what was already said in the preceding blessing of Shema Koleinu, the difference in language between them is very significant.
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Words like *retzei* and *leratzon* are nearly always used in association with the way G-d is asked to respond to what we bring to Him, not to what we ask of Him. And so in Retzei, which relates to our “prayer offerings,” we ask G-d to “receive with love.” In Shema Koleinu, which relates to our petitions, we ask G-d to “hear with mercy.”

See further the Morasha Class, Close Encounters of the Transcendent Kind: The Temple and the Sacrifices.

Key Themes of עבודה – Temple Service.

- This prayer asks for the restitution of the sacrificial service in the Temple. The Hebrew word for sacrifice is *korban*, which means “that which brings us close (to G-d).” Bringing sacrifices is a physical manifestation of our love for and devotion to G-d. The dedication of an animal served as a springboard for the dedication of the person who brought it as a sacrifice.
- While we pray in this berachah for a return of the Divine Presence, it is difficult to relate to what that means, since we personally never experienced it. We just know that without the Temple and G-d’s Presence there, we lack an intimate connection with G-d.
- Sacrifices serve to bring G-d’s Presence into this world. As such, they are likened to the spiritual food sustaining our physical world.
- Without the Temple, our prayers take on the role that sacrifices used to hold. This is not a poetic leap. Sacrifice was always just the external accompaniment of an inner act of heart and mind, such as thanksgiving or atonement. Though the outer act is no longer possible, the inner act still is.

Berachah 18. הודאה (*Hoda'ah*) – Thanksgiving

מִזְדִּים אֲנִיחֵנוּ לָךְ וְשָׂאתָהּ הוּא ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְאַלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד, צוּרֵנוּ צוּר חַיִּינוּ, מְגִן יִשְׁעֵנוּ אַתָּה הוּא
לְדוֹר וָדוֹר. נוֹדָה לָךְ וְנִסְפָּר תְּהִלָּתְךָ עַל חַיֵּינוּ הַמְּסוּרִים בְּיָדְךָ וְעַל נְשִׁמוֹתֵינוּ הַפְּקוּדוֹת לָךְ,
וְעַל גְּסִיד שְׂפָכְךָ יוֹם עֲמָנוּ, וְעַל נִפְלְאוֹתֶיךָ וְטוֹבוֹתֶיךָ שֶׁבְּכָל יְעַת, עֶרֶב וּבֹקֶר וְצֹהֲרָיִם. הַטּוֹב - כִּי לֹא כָלוּ
רַחֲמֶיךָ, וְהַמְּרַחֵם - כִּי לֹא תָמוּ חֲסִדֶיךָ, כִּי מֵעוֹלָם קִיְּנוּ לָךְ.
וְעַל כָּלֵם יִתְבָּרַךְ וְיִתְרוֹמֵם וְיִתְנַשֵּׂא שְׁמֶךָ מְלִכְנוּ תָּמִיד לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד.
וְכָל חַיִּים יוֹדִים סְלָה, וְיִתְלָלוּ וְיִבְרְכוּ אֶת שְׁמֶךָ תְּגִדּוֹל בְּאַמֶּת, לְעוֹלָם כִּי טוֹב, הָאֵל יִשׁוּעָתֵנוּ וְעֲזָרָתֵנוּ סְלָה,
הָאֵל הַטּוֹב. בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְקוֹק הַטּוֹב שְׁמֶךָ וְלָךְ נִאֲחָה לְהוֹדוֹת.

We gratefully thank You, for it is You Who are G-d, our G-d and the G-d of our forefathers for all eternity; You are the Rock of our lives, Shield of our salvation from generation to generation.

We shall thank You and relate Your praise for our lives, which are given into Your hand and for our souls that are entrusted to You; Your miracles that are with us every day; and for Your wonders and favors in every season – evening, morning, and afternoon. The Beneficent One, for Your compassions have never ceased, and the Compassionate One, for Your kindnesses have never ended – always have we put our hope in You.

For all these, may Your Name be blessed and exalted, our King, continually forever and ever.

All living beings will gratefully acknowledge You, Selah! And praise Your Name sincerely, O G-d of our salvation and help, Selah! Blessed are You, G-d, Your Name is “The Beneficent One,” and to You it is fitting to give thanks.

Of the three concluding berachot of the Shemoneh Esrei, it is in this berachah of Hoda'ah that we have the opportunity to truly express our gratitude to G-d and to thank Him for everything that He gives us. Our discussion here will focus on what it really means to say “thank you” to G-d.

Part A. The Real Meaning of Thanks

The first place in the Torah that we find thanks being given to G-d is when Leah gives birth to her fourth son, Yehuda. From this account, along with what our Sages glean from it, we can learn the true nature of thanks.

1. Bereishit (Genesis) 29:35 – Leah thanked G-d when she gave birth to her fourth son, Yehuda.

She became pregnant again and had a son. She said, “This time I will thank (<i>odeh</i>) G-d,” and she named the child Yehuda. She then stopped having children.	ותהר עוד ותלד בן ותאמר הפעם אודה את יקוק על כן קראה שמו יהודה ותעמד מלדת:
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2. Talmud Bavli, Berachot 7b – Leah was the first to truly thank G-d.

Rabbi Yochanan further said in the name of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai: From the day that the Holy One, blessed be He, created His world there was no one that thanked the Holy One, blessed be He, until Leah came and thanked Him. For it is said: ‘This time will I thank G-d.	ואמר רבי יוחנן משום רבי שמעון בן יוחי: מיום שברא הקדוש ברוך הוא את עולמו לא היה אדם שהודה להקדוש ברוך הוא עד שבאתה לאה והודתו, שנאמר [בראשית כ”ט] הפעם אודה את ה'.
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What does it mean that Leah was the first to thank G-d? How could it be that all the great people who preceded her had failed in this simple act of common decency? How could she have been the first to do this?

Of course, others had thanked G-d. But no one truly expressed their appreciation and understanding of their debt of gratitude to G-d until Leah gave birth to Yehuda.

Rashi tells why this occasion inspired Leah to thank G-d.

3. Rashi, Commentary to Berachot 7b – Leah thanked G-d for giving her more than her due.

<p>This time I will thank G-d – because she saw prophetically that Yaakov was to establish twelve tribes (through twelve sons) and he had four wives (hence three sons to each wife). When she bore her fourth son, she thanked G-d for her portion that was more than her fair share.</p>	<p>הפעם אודה את ה' - לפי שראתה ברוח הקודש שיעקב מעמיד שנים עשר שבטים ולו ארבע נשים, כיון שילדה בן רביעי הודית על חלקה שעלה יותר מן החשבון המגיע לה.</p>
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4. Rabbi Yitzchak Hutner, Pachad Yitzchak, Chanukah 2:2 (translated and adapted by Rabbi Pinchas Stolper, Chanukah in a New Light, pp.28-29) – Every thanksgiving is essentially an admittance of indebtedness.

<p>The Hebrew language often uses one word to express two different concepts. The word <i>boda'ah</i> is used to thank someone. It is also used to acknowledge that someone else is right. This linguistic partnership is rooted in the fact that hidden in every person's psyche is a yearning for independence, for not being dependent or reliant on someone else. When a person thanks a friend for a favor, inherent in these thanks is an acknowledgement that he wasn't able to solve or satisfy his need by himself. Every thank you is in its depth an acknowledgement of a need for the generosity of someone else. This pertains in far greater measure when we think of the appreciation and acknowledgement an individual owes his Creator.</p> <p>“Like a wild ass is man born”(Iyov/Job 11:12). Every person would prefer to be able to say, “It is my strength and my talent that accomplished all of this” (Devarim 8:17). When a person brings a thanks-offering to G-d it is an acknowledgement that without G-d he would be nothing and he would have nothing.</p> <p>The above introduces a unique dualism in the concept of <i>boda'ah</i> (thanks, appreciation,</p>	<p>בבנין המלים של לשון הקודש נזדמנו לפונדק אחד שני מושגים: הבעת החזקת טובה, והסכמה לדעת הצד השני. לשני המושגים הללו יש בלשון הקודש ביטוי משותף: הודאה. הודאת בעל דין — פירושה הסכמה לדבריו של הצד השני; הודאה על העבר — פירושה הבעת החזקת טובה על מעשה חסד. הסברת השיתוף הזה היא, כי בתכונת נפשו של אדם טמונה היא השאיפה לחיות סמוכה על שלחן עצמה, מבלי להזקק לעזרתו של הזולת. ובשעה שאדם מביע את הכרת טובתו לחברו ונותן לו תודה, באותה שעה יש כאן הודאת בעל דין כי בפעם הזאת אמנם לא עלתה בידו והיה עליו להשתמש בטובתו של חברו. באופן שהשרש הנפשי העמוק של כל הבעת תודה הוא מעשה הודאה. ועל אחת כמה וכמה שכך הוא הענין בבין אדם למקום.</p> <p>עיר פרא אדם יולד. ובטבע הפרא של כל אדם גנוזה היא ההנחה של כוחי ועוצם ידי עשה לי את החיל הזה. ובשעה שהוא מקריב את תודתו למקום הרי זו הודאה כי לית ליה מגרמיה כלום.</p> <p>ענין זה מכניס הבלטה מיוחדת בכפילות מושג ההודאה בסגנונה של ברכת ההודאה בשמונה עשרה, המתחלת</p>
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<p>acknowledgement) which is found in the text of the blessing of thanks in the Shemoneh Esrei. The blessing opens with the words “<i>Modim anachnu Lach</i>,” “we gratefully thank You that...,” and then in the very next sentence we say, “<i>Nodeh Lechah</i>,” “we thank You...,” repeating the idea of hoda’ah. <i>Modim</i> and <i>nodeh</i> are the same verb. [If we are using both to mean we “thank,” then why repeat this verb? We can now solve this mysterious formulation by positing that “Modim” is not saying “Let us thank You,” but rather “Let us acknowledge You.” Then “Nodeh Lechah” adds “Let us thank You.”]</p> <p>Even though our acknowledging the viewpoint of someone else and our expression of thanks share the same verb, when we see the preposition that follows the verb we are able to identify which verb is intended. If your intention is to give thanks, the next word is <i>for</i>, meaning that I am grateful for your having done such and such for me. The word <i>for</i> stands in the place of the Hebrew <i>al</i>. If your intention is to acknowledge that you agree with someone else, the word that follows is <i>that</i>, as when one person acknowledges that the other is correct. Since the opening of the Modim prayer in the Shemoneh Esrei is “Modim <i>that</i> You are [our G-d],” we understand it as an acknowledgement [of G-d]. Afterward, we say “Nodeh... <i>for</i> our lives which are within Your power,” meaning that we are expressing thanks for them.</p>	<p>ב"מודים אנחנו לך", ותיכף במשפט הסמוך לו חוזר הוא ענין זה "נודה לך ונספר תהלתך." אלא שהם הם הדברים המבוארים בכאן.</p> <p>אף על פי שגם הסכמה לדעתו של הצד השני וגם הבעת החזקת טובה יש להם שם הפועל משותף, מכל מקום מחולקים הם באופן קשורו של הפועל עם הבא לאחריו. בשעה שהכונה היא על הבעת החזקת טובה הרי הוא מקושר עם מה שלאחריו על ידי תיבת "על", דהיינו שהחזקת הטובה היא על שעשית עמדי כך וכך, ובזה תיבת "על" עומדת היא במקום עבור; ואלו כשהכונה היא הסכמה לדעתו של הצד השני, הרי הוא מקושר עם מה שלאחריו על ידי האות "ש", כגון ראובן מודה שהוא חייב לשמעון. ומפני כן מכיון שהפתיחה של ברכת ההודאה דשמונה עשרה היא במודים אנחנו לך "שאתה" וגו' הרי פירושה של הודאה זו הוא במובן של הודאת בעל דין. ואלו ההודאה במשפט השני של ברכה זו אשר תיבת "על" רצופה לו, "נודה לך על חיינו המסורים בידך" הרי הכונה היא במובן קרבן תודה.</p>
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This dual nature of hoda’ah sheds light on the statement of our Sages that Leah was the first to truly thank G-d. Others may have appreciated what G-d gave them but Leah was the first to admit it was more than she deserved.

5. Ibid. – Leah both thanked and acknowledged G-d.

<p>Examine the comment of Rashi to the statement of Leah when she gave birth to Yehuda. She said, “<i>Hapa’am odeh et Hashem</i>,” which we generally translate as, “Now, I will thank G-d.” Rashi adds that these thanks are in appreciation of the fact that “I received more children than had been allotted to me” (Rashi, Bereishit 32:27). The appreciation of Leah for the fact that she gave birth to Yehuda also indicates an</p>	<p>ויעוין עוד רש"י על אמירתה של לאה הפעם אודה את השם, והוסיף רש"י על זה "שנטלתי יותר מחלקי." כלומר ענין התודה עבור לידתו של יהודה כולל בתוכו גם הודאת בעל דין שזוה אינו מגיע לה בדין.</p>
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acknowledgement similar to that of a party to a dispute, that under a system of equity she was not entitled to this child.	
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Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe (Alei Shur, Vol. II, pp. 280-281) writes that there are two flaws that keep people from being grateful. One is the natural human tendency toward myopia. We think that we deserve everything in the world, that there is nothing that others could give us that we don't already believe should be ours anyway. The second is the feeling of owing someone for what they have done for you. This feeling creates, ever so subtly, an uncomfortable sense of subjugation to that other person.

In this light we can appreciate that Leah overcame both obstacles: She recognized her child as a gift from G-d that she did not deserve and admitted her indebtedness on that account.

Part B. Thanks as a Foundation of Faith

Appreciating what G-d gives us and recognizing Him as the source of blessing in our lives is not just a *nice* thing to do. In Judaism, this recognition forms the backbone of any truly religious existence.

1. Rabbi Zev Leff, Shemoneh Esrei, pg. 432-3 – We only recognize G-d through the good He does for us.

The purpose of creation is G-d's will to bestow the absolute good, to shower that good eternally on a creation that could receive that good (see Mesilat Yesharim, Ch. 1, and Derech Hashem, Ch. 2). G-d therefore created souls which are a creation as close to Him as could be, capable of receiving G-d's splendor by cleaving to Him eternally. This is what we call "Olam Haba," when the souls of the righteous eternally bask in the splendor of G-d's presence; this is the ultimate pleasure and the ultimate good.

However, in order for this pleasure to be completely appreciated, G-d deemed that it had to be earned. Therefore He created a physical world in which He put the souls within physical bodies. He gave them the opportunity to utilize the physical world to recognize G-d and to act in a G-dly manner so that the souls could become more and more G-d-like and therefore create a relationship with the Creator when it would eventually leave the body and the physical world.

Hence, our purpose in this world is to find G-d and G-dliness within a materialistic and physical world. In order to recognize and find G-d Who is the ultimate good, one must recognize His goodness.

Therefore one must be aware of the multitude of kindnesses that G-d constantly showers on the world. Since G-d is invisible and His essence beyond our comprehension, it is only by recognizing the good that emanates from Him that we can recognize Him.

Hence, *bakarat batov* means first and foremost recognizing good – not necessarily being grateful, but merely recognizing that good exists... Consequently, the root of all sins is the failure to recognize what is really good, the substitution of bad for good, and the choice to do bad over good.

2. Rabbeinu Bachya ibn Pakuda, Chovot HaLevavot (Duties of the Heart) 3:6 – The good that G-d does for us obligates us to serve Him in return.

People become more obligated in their service (to G-d) in relation to the bounty – general and particular – bestowed upon them.	כי תוספת העבודה על אנשיה מתחלקת מדרך הכלל והפרט בטובה עליהם.
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Rabbeinu Bachya follows this statement by spelling out various levels of indebtedness to G-d, starting with the general requirements of mankind to observe the Seven Noachide Commandments because G-d created us, followed by the responsibility of Jews to keep mitzvot due to our special relationship with G-d, and finally the individual's obligation to show appreciation for the unique gifts G-d has granted him or her.

3. Rabbi Yitzchak Maltzan, Siach Yitzchak (Siddur HaGra), pg. 139 – We must thank G-d as human beings, Jews, and individuals.

<p>“For our lives that are placed in Your hands... and for Your wonders at every moment.” Rabbi Yitzchak Blazar explained this berachah in light of the words of the book Chovot HaLevavot, that gratitude and service to G-d can be divided into a few categories. The first is the goodness that G-d grants to humanity insofar as He created them, gave them life, and is good to them, and thus they are beholden to serve G-d in a general way. The second category relates to the good that G-d does for a particular nation, such as the way in which He was good to the Jewish people in taking them out of Egypt, etc. This gratitude demands a higher level of commitment to serving G-d than the first. The third category is the unique good that G-d bestows to each individual, and for each of these favors, a person would feel more obligated to make a further commitment to serving G-d.</p> <p>Based on this classification, we can understand this berachah (of Thanksgiving). First we say “for our lives placed in Your hand” which includes all living beings. Then we say “for the miracles that are with us each day.” This refers to the Jewish nation of which the verse states, “Were it not that G-d is with us... they would swallow us alive” (Tehillim 124:1-3), which is why we say “with us.” Only then do we mention “for Your wonders and favors in every season,” that is, what G-d does for each individual.</p>	<p>על חיינו המסורים בידך וכו' ועל נפלאותיך שבכל עת, פי' הגאון מוהר"י בלאזער על פי דברי החובות הלבבות (שער פ"ה פ"ו) כי תוספת ההודאה והעבודה מתחלקת לכמה אופנים, הראשון טובת הבורא הכוללת כל האדם, והוא המציאם אחר שלא היו דבר נמצא והחיותם והטובה להם וכו' ועל כרחק הם חייבים להבורא יתברך עבודה כוללת וכו' והענין הב' טובת הבורא על עם מן העמים כמו שהטיב לבני ישראל בהוציאם מארץ מצרים וכו' וחייבם בזה עבודה יתירה על העבודה הראשונה והענין הג' טובת ה' על איש מאישי בני אדם נתיחד בה ועל כל טובה מהם יתחייב בעבודה יתירה לה', עכ"ד.</p> <p>ועל דרך זה הוא הכונה כאן תחלה אמר על חיינו המסורים בידך שזה כולל כל באי עולם ואחר כך אמר על נסיך שבכל יום עמנו היינו עם אומה הישראלית כענין שאמר הכתוב “לולי ה' שהיה לנו... אזי חיים בלענו” ועל כן אומרים “עמנו” ואחר כך אומרים על ונפלאותיך וטובותיך שבכל עת. היינו מה שעושה עם כל אדם ביחוד.</p>
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4. Rabbi Avraham Edelstein, Commentary on the Siddur, Ner Le'Elef, pg. 154 – Thanking G-d for restoring our souls.

מודים is the blessing of הודאה, in which we thank G-d for all the good He does for us. Each day miraculous events happen, events that we often don't know about or even realize their true extent. מודים is the time to express our gratitude to G-d for returning our souls to us each morning. The Gemara likens the returning of our souls to collateral given for a debt one owes: if a person does not pay his debt, the owner keeps the collateral. G-d, Who “owns” our souls and all else, overlooks all we owe Him and returns our souls, our “collateral,” each day, even though we have not settled our debts with Him. This thought should cause us to praise and thank G-d.

Part C. Bowing during Hoda'ah

We bow both at the beginning and at the end of this berachah. What is the significance of bowing, and why do we specifically bow here, during Thanksgiving?

Before we explore the significance of bowing, let us ask a more fundamental question: Why do we not bow during the entire recitation of the Shemoneh Esrei (as some other religions do during their prayer services)? In fact, the Shemoneh Esrei is also known as the *Amidah*, the standing prayer! Why do we stand upright throughout and only bow at key features in the service?

The precedent for standing during prayer goes all the way back to the first Jew and the very beginnings of Jewish prayer.

1. Talmud Bavli, Berachot 26b – The Patriarchs introduced three prayers.

Rabbi Yossi bar Rabbi Chaninah said: The prayers were instituted by the forefathers ... Avraham (Abraham) established the morning prayer, as it is stated... “And Avraham went in the morning to the place where he had stood (*ammad*) [before] G-d” (Bereishit/Genesis 19:26). “*Amidah*” is a term specifically used for prayer, as it says, “And Pinchas stood (*vayaamad*) and prayed” (Tehillim 106:30).

רבי יוסי ברבי חנינא אמר: תפלות אבות תקנום ... אברהם תקן תפילת שחרית שנא' וישכם אברהם בבקר אל המקום אשר עמד שם ואין עמידה אלא תפילה שנאמר ויעמד פינחס.

2. Maharal, Derech Chaim, Commentary to Pirkei Avot 3:18 (translated and adapted by Rabbi Tuvia Bassar, Maharal of Prague: Pirkei Avot, pg. 184) – Mankind's upright stature is a facet of being created in the image of G-d.

Scripture says: “And G-d created mankind in His own image; in the image of G-d He created him; male and female He created them.” This passage does not mean that G-d has an image or appearance, for He certainly does not. Rather, it refers to the fact that a physical image can represent the nature of something abstract. For example, a person could design a symbol, expressing that G-d is supreme King and none is

ויש לפרש מה שאמר הכתוב ויברא אלהים את האדם בצלמו אין פירושו שיש אל השם יתברך צלם ודמות שאין הדבר כך כלל, אבל הכתוב בא לומר כי כאשר בא לרמוז בתמונה הגשמית מה שנמצא בהקב"ה בעיון נבדל מן הגשמי, כי בודאי יכול האדם לצייר בענין הגשמי דבר הנבדל הבלתי גשמי, דמיון זה כאשר בא לצייר השם יתברך שהוא מלך על הכל ואין עליו במציאות, הנה יצייר תמונה בזקיפה, אף בודאי שאין לתת שום תמונה חס וחלילה אל השם יתברך, היינו שדבר זה אסור בודאי

above Him, by drawing an upright figure. That symbol, although expressed in a physical medium, would not have to imply that He has a form. Similarly, mankind's upright stature symbolizes that G-d is King, without implying that He has a form. Other living creatures are bent over, symbolizing their submission to a higher being; namely, mankind. Since G-d has no one over Him, the upright form that was given to mankind is fittingly described as an image of G-d.	לאדם מצד השכל שבאדם שמישיג הדבר כפי מה שהוא כמו שיתבאר, אבל מכל מקום מה שנמצא בהקב"ה היא מצוייר באדם הגשמי שבריותו של אדם בזקיפה ולא כמו שאר בעלי חיים הולכי שחוח, כי מי שהולך שחוח הוא מורה על שיש עליו אדון ולפיכך הולך שחוח כמו עבד שהולך שחוח לפני אדון שלו, אבל השם יתברך אין עליו לכך האדם שהוא בזקיפה נאמר עליו שהוא בצלם אלהים.
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Praying upright expresses the Divine aspect of our humanity. However, when it comes to thanking G-d, we need to show submission. That is why bowing is so crucial during this berachah.

3. Talmud Bavli, Bava Kamma 16a – The Talmud warns against failing to bow during Modim.

The spine of a person turns into a snake seven years after burial, but that only happens to someone who fails to bow during Modim.	שדרו של אדם לאחר שבע שנים נעשה נחש; והני מילי דלא כרע במודים.
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4. Rabbi Avraham Chaim Shor, Torat Chaim, Bava Kamma 16a – One who denies G-d's goodness subscribes to the attitude of the primeval snake.

One who maintains an upright posture and does not bow while stating his gratitude is essentially denying any gratitude. We see this in Scriptures (Bamidbar/ Numbers 16:27) concerning Datan and Aviram, who denied the authenticity of the Torah; they are depicted as standing upright. Similarly, the Midrash depicts the primeval serpent as approaching Chava (Eve) in an upright posture, since he denied G-d. In fact, this is why the serpent's punishment was “on your belly shall you crawl” (Bereishit 3:14). As Rashi teaches us, it had legs which were removed. We can suggest that this is why if someone fails to bow down during Modim, indicating a lack of gratitude to G-d, his spine turns into a serpent; he is espousing the philosophy of the primeval serpent from which all heresy and foreign ideas follow.	שכל העומד בקומה זקופה ככופר בדבר הוא ואין הודאתו הודאה כדאשכחן בדתן ואבירם שכפרו בתורת משה כתיב בהו יצאו נצבים בקומה זקופה ואמרו במדרש רבה על הנחש כשבא לפתות את חוה בא בקומה זקופה לפי שבא לכפור בו יתברך ולכך נענש במדה ללכת שחוח שנאמר על גחונך תלך דרגלים היו לו ונקצצו ואפשר לומר דמהאי טעמא מי שאינו כורע במודים שדרו נעשה נחש דכיון שעומד בקומה זקופה ואינו כורע ומתכוין להודות לו יתברך על כל חסדיו הרי הוא ככופר בו יתברך ואומר לא הוא והרי הוא כמודה לדעת הנחש הקדמוני אשר כל הכפירות והדעות החיצוניות נמשכין ממנו.
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5. Rabbi Shimon Schwab, On Prayer, pg. 521 – The snake was cursed with losing the ability to recognize G-d as the source of blessing in his life.

It is common knowledge that every piece of Aggadeta has a profound meaning, but it is not always simple to decipher its true explanation. In this case, it is possible that our Sages intended to convey the idea that if one does not show his gratitude to G-d and bow at Modim, he is acting in a way	
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similar to the primordial snake, the serpent in the Garden of Eden, whose ingratitude caused it to be downgraded from a highly intelligent animal to a lowly snake which, like other animals, does not have the capacity to show its gratitude to the Source of its existence.

The primordial snake referred to in the Torah, in connection with the sin of Adam and Chavah, was by no means identical with the snakes with which we are familiar. This was the one creature that was given the highest intelligence of all the animals, including the power of speech, “Now the serpent was cunning beyond any beast of the field” (Bereishit 3:1). However, this creature, in an act of profound ingratitude, utilized its great intelligence against its Creator.

In meting out its punishment, G-d decreed, among other things, “You shall eat dust as long as you live” (ibid. 3:14). And our Sages tell us (Talmud Bavli, Yoma 75a) that because of this, whatever the snake eats – even the greatest delicacy – tastes like dust, as it says, “A snake's food will be dust” (Yeshayahu 65:25). But, the Sages add, this curse of the snake also makes it possible for it to find food wherever it may be, because dust is available everywhere.

We may therefore conclude that this constant availability of its food is a part of the curse and downgrading of the primordial snake. It was reduced from a highly intelligent animal – which recognized G-d, and could appreciate that He provides it with its food – to that of a common snake, which does not possess this ability. Because of its ingratitude, it was condemned forever to a life of unawareness and ingratitude similar to other animals. It lost the ability to recognize G-d as the Source of its sustenance, and therefore to have the opportunity to be grateful to Him for it.

One of mankind's greatest blessings is that we are able to recognize the Divine Providence of G-d in our daily existence and express our gratitude to Him for it.

Rabbi Zev Leff illustrates the curse of the serpent with the following story:

A young man was once brought to me despondent and depressed, literally on the verge of suicide. When I asked him what so depressed him, he told me, “My parents have been divorced for a few years, and I've been living with my father. Recently, he met a woman he wanted to marry. She didn't like having me around the house, so my father called me in one day and pulled out a set of keys from his pocket. He told me the keys belonged to a fully furnished apartment he had purchased for me. He pulled another set of keys from his other pocket and informed me that these were to a new sports car that he had bought for me. Finally, my father gave me a credit card on his account for food, clothing, and incidental expenses. He then shook my hand and wished me well. He made it clear that our lives were to go separate ways and that I shouldn't bother to visit or call him, just give him and his wife their space to enjoy themselves.”

Some would say this sounds like a teenager's dream: your own apartment, a car, and unlimited credit. However, every time this young man entered that apartment or drove that car or used the credit card, it reminded him that no one loved him or wanted him. What could be more depressing?

In a similar vein, the serpent was given a plentiful food supply, but at the expense of a relationship with G-d. It was as if G-d said, “I don't want to have anything to do with you. Here is your food; leave me alone and I'll leave you alone” (Rabbi Zev Leff, Shemoneh Esrei, pp. 437-8).

Part D. Thanking G-d for the Everyday Miracles

The ability to thank G-d is rooted in an awareness of His involvement in our everyday lives, a concept known as *Hashgachah Pratit* or Individual Divine Providence.

1. Ramban (Nachmanides), Commentary to Shemot (Exodus) 13:16 – The belief in Divine supervision of the world is expressed in terms of Divine response to human deeds.

From knowing the revealed miracles, a person becomes aware of the hidden miracles – this belief is the basis for the entire Torah. A man has no share in the Torah, unless he believes that all matters and all events, whether on a communal level or an individual level, are miracles, and not due to “nature” or “the way of the world.” Rather, if a person performs the mitzvot, his reward will bring him success, and if he transgresses, he incurs punishment, all by decree from Above.	ומן הנסים הגדולים המפורסמים אדם מודה בנסים הנסתרים שהם יסוד התורה כלה, שאין לאדם חלק בתורת משה רבינו עד שנאמין בכל דברינו ומקרינו שכלם נסים אין בהם טבע ומנהגו של עולם, בין ברבים בין ביחיד, אלא אם יעשה המצות יצליחנו שכרו, ואם יעבור עליהם יכריתנו ענשו, הכל בגזרת עליון.
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2. Rabbi Yehuda Aryeh Leib Alter, Sfat Emet, Parshat Behar 5637 – Nature and miracle are one and the same.

Miracles and nature are one and the same. In truth, the biggest miracle is nature itself for it is the greatest of all wonders for us to contemplate... Those generations that witnessed miracles had faith affixed to them, and for them miracle and nature were the same.	הנסים והטבעים הכל אחד ובאמת אין נס גדול כמו הטבע שהוא הגדול שבנפלאות המושגים לנו... ובאמת הדורות שנעשה להם הנסים היה קבוע בהם האמונה והיה שווה להם הטבע והנסים.
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The Talmud illustrates this principle with the following story:

3. Talmud Bavli, Taanit 25a – The lesson derived by lighting Shabbat candles with vinegar.

One late Friday afternoon, just after the sun had set and the Sabbath had begun, Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa saw his daughter appearing sad and he asked her, “Why do you look downcast?” She responded, “I mistakenly used vinegar to light the Shabbat candles instead of oil [and was worried that the candles would soon burn out].” He said to her, “Why should that concern you? He Who decreed that oil will light, will also say that vinegar should light!”	חד בי שמש חזייה לברתיה דהוות עציבא, אמר לה בתי למאי עציבת? אמרה ליה: כלי של חומץ נתחלף לי בכלי של שמן והדלקתי ממנו אור לשבת. אמר לה בתי מאי אכפת לך? מי שאמר לשמן וידלוק הוא יאמר לחומץ וידלוק.
We learned that in fact the candle remained lit the entire Shabbat, and the flame was used to light a Havdallah candle after the Sabbath (see Rashi).	תנא היה דולק והולך כל היום כולו, עד שהביאו ממנו אור להבדלה.

Just as it was miraculous that the vinegar served as fuel for that particular Shabbat, it is likewise miraculous that oil which “normally” burns, is also a miracle. Consequently, whether we are aware of it or not, there is no end to the things we can be thankful to G-d for, as the following story teaches us:

Rabbi Yisrael Salanter once left his family and disciples in Eastern Europe to go to Paris (for a debate). One day he entered an elegant restaurant to meet with some of the many Jews who frequented the establishment. Rav Yisrael was seated at his table and ordered a glass of water. When he was ready to leave, the waiter presented him with a bill for the astronomic sum of forty francs. “Why do you charge so much for a glass of water?” asked Rav Yisrael. The waiter replied, “Monsieur, you must realize that you are not merely paying for a simple glass of water. You are paying for the surroundings, the ambience. You are paying for the gorgeous furniture, tableware, carpeting and chandeliers, not to mention the view!”

The answer struck a chord in Rav Yisrael’s heart. He hastened back to his lodgings and wrote a letter to his disciples: “For a long time I have been puzzled by the fact that we recite a very lofty and all-inclusive blessing for a plain glass of water, saying, “Blessed are You, G-d our L-rd, King of the universe, through Whose word everything came to be.” But from the words of a gentile waiter in Paris I learned that we are not merely thanking G-d for the glass of water; we are expressing our appreciation for the magnificent surroundings in which G-d serves the water to us. We are thanking G-d for the fresh air we breathe as we drink that water, and for the sun which gives us light, and for the tree which shades us. In short, whenever we thank G-d for one thing, we should use it as an opportunity to thank G-d for everything” (Rabbi Avrohom Chaim Feuer, Shemoneh Esrei, pg. 257).

Key Themes of תודאה – Thanksgiving.

- Our Sages tell us that the matriarch Leah was the first to truly thank G-d. That is because she not only recognized that she was given something – her fourth son – that she did not deserve, but also admitted her indebtedness to G-d for it.
- Appreciating what G-d has given us forms the bedrock of our relationship with Him. As a result of our gratitude toward Him, we feel an obligation to fulfill His mitzvot.
- While standing during prayer is an expression of our exalted human quality of resembling the Divine, we show our submissiveness to G-d through the act of bowing, lowering ourselves from that upright posture.
- Gratitude to G-d grows out of an awareness of His involvement in the world and in our lives. G-d’s miracles disguised as nature surround us each day.

Berachah 19. שלום (Shalom) – Peace

שִׁים שְׁלוֹם טוֹבָה וּבְרָכָה. חֵן וְחֶסֶד וְרַחֲמִים עָלֵינוּ וְעַל כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל עִמָּךְ. בְּרַכְנוּ אֲבִינוּ כְּלָנוּ כְּאֶחָד בְּאוֹר פְּנִיךָ.
כִּי בְּאוֹר פְּנִיךָ נִתְּנָה לָנוּ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ תּוֹרַת חַיִּים וְאַהֲבַת חֶסֶד. וְצִדְקָה וּבְרָכָה וְרַחֲמִים וְחַיִּים וְשְׁלוֹם. וְטוֹב
בְּעֵינֶיךָ לְבָרֶךְ אֶת כָּל עַמָּךְ יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּכָל יְעַת וּבְכָל שָׁעָה בְּשָׁלוֹמְךָ:
בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה הַמְּבָרֵךְ אֶת עַמּוֹ יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּשָׁלוֹם.

Establish peace, goodness, blessing, graciousness, kindness, and compassion upon us and upon all of Your people Israel. Bless us, our Father, all of us as one, with the light of Your countenance, for with the light of Your countenance You gave us, L-rd our G-d, the Torah of life and a love of kindness, righteousness, blessing, compassion, life, and peace. And may it be good in Your eyes to bless Your people Israel, in every season and in every hour with Your peace. Blessed are You, G-d, Who blesses His people Israel with peace.

Part A. The Meta-Blessing

The blessing of Shalom (peace) is the quintessential berachah in Judaism. It is how we greet each other, how we take leave of each other, and how we bless each other. What is so special about peace that it holds such a prominent place in our lexicon?

1. Midrash Bamidbar Rabbah 21:1 – In Judaism, peace is the universal blessing.

The world could not be maintained except by Shalom, and the Torah is wholly peace; as it says, “Its ways are ways of pleasantness, and all its paths are Shalom.” If a person comes from a journey, he is received with the greeting of Shalom. In the morning the greeting of Shalom is also offered, and in the evening likewise the greeting is Shalom. The reading of the passage “Hear, O Israel” (the Shema) concludes with the words, “He spreads the tabernacle of peace over His people.” The Shemoneh Esrei concludes with peace. The priestly benediction concludes with peace...	אין העולם מתנהג אלא בשלום והתורה כולה שלום שנא' (משלי ג) דרכיה דרכי נועם וכל נתיבותיה שלום ואם בא אדם מן הדרך שואלין לו שלום וכן שחרית שואלין לו שלום ובאמש כך שואלין בשלום, שמע ישראל חותמין פורס סוכת שלום על עמו, התפלה חותמין בשלום, בברכת כהנים חותמין בשלום.
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When we ask for peace we are not just making one last request. Having asked for so much already we now ask G-d for something to help us receive the blessings we asked for. That “something” is peace.

2. Mishnah, Uktzin 3:12 –Peace is the vessel for holding blessing.

Rabbi Shimon bar Chalafta said: the Holy One, blessed be He, found no vessel better to contain blessing for Israel than peace, as it is written: “The L-rd will give strength unto His people; the L-rd will bless His people with peace” (Tehillim 29:11).	אמר רבי שמעון בן חלפתא לא מצא הקדוש ב"ה כלי מחזיק ברכה לישראל אלא השלום שנאמר (תהלים כ"ט) ה' עוז לעמו יתן ה' יברך את עמו בשלום:
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3. Sifra, Parshat Bechukotai 1:1 – Without peace what good is prosperity?

<p>“And you shall eat your bread to satiation” (Vayikra 26:5)... You may think to yourselves, “Look, we have food, we have drink, but if there isn’t peace, there isn’t anything [so what good is it?]” Therefore G-d also promised, “I shall establish peace in the Land” (Ibid. 26:6). This teaches us that peace is more valuable than anything else!</p>	<p>ואכלתם לחמכם לשובע... שמא תאמרו הרי מאכל והרי משתה אם אין שלום אין כלום ת”ל ונתתי שלום בארץ, מגיד שהשלום שקול כנגד הכל.</p>
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4. Rabbi Chaim Friedlander, Sifte Chaim: Rinat Chaim, pg. 285 – Without peace the other berachot we ask for are worthless.

<p>Our Sages say that “the Holy One, blessed be He, found no vessel better to contain blessing for Israel than peace.” Hence, peace is not just another berachah but rather a vessel for holding other berachot. Were a person to have a vessel full of holes, he would not be able to contain anything in it because everything would just fall through the holes and get lost. So too all the berachot of the Shemoneh Esrei and Birkat Kohanim only endure if a person has the “vessel” of peace within which to contain them. Without peace – but rather with jealousy, hatred, rivalry, and quarrelling – it would be impossible for either an individual or a community to enjoy any of the berachot. They would be completely worthless.</p>	<p>אמרו חז”ל (סוף עוקצין) “לא מצא הקב”ה כלי מחזיק ברכה לישראל אלא השלום”, נמצא, שה”שלום” אינו הברכה כשלעצמה, אלא הכלי שמחזיק את הברכות, ואם יהיה לאדם כלי מלא חורים אינו יכול להחזיק בו שום דבר, כי הכל יפול דרך הנקבים ויאבד ממנו, כך כל מה שביקשנו בתפילת שמו”ע, וכן כל ברכת הכהנים “ויברכך” ו”ישמרך” וגו’. יש להם קיום רק כאשר יש לאדם את כלי ה”שלום”, כי בהעדר השלום, אלא יש קנאה שנאה תחרות ומחלוקת, אי אפשר ליחיד ולציבור ליהנות מכל הברכות, ואין להם ערך כלל.</p>
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Part B. Wholeness and Harmony

Shalom, the Hebrew word for Peace, comes from the word *shleimut*, which means completeness or wholeness. Its opposite is *machloket*, dispute, which comes from the word *chelek*, a fragment of something.

The natural world is a constant struggle between competing forces. Socially, too, the natural state of mankind is that of strife. This world is a world of disparate identities where truth and the commitment to it are not great enough to overcome the unique perspectives and inclinations different people bring to a situation. Unless they make an effort, people naturally move away from each other rather than draw closer together.

Were it not for G-d Himself, the world – be it the natural world or the social world of human interrelations – would lack any semblance of unity.

1. Rabbi Meir Leibush (Malbim), Commentary to Bamidbar 25:12 – G-d makes a covenant of peace which unifies the fragmented pieces of reality that comprise our world.

G-d made a pact of peace with reality as a whole, for the entire cosmos is made up of opposing forces and these forces also drive people apart. Only the Presence of G-d, Who is the soul of the world that keeps it alive and enduring, binds all the disparate forces that exist in the world and makes peace between them.	והקב"ה כרת עם כלל המציאות ברית השלום, כי כל המציאות מורכב מכחות מתנגדים זל"ז והם מפורדים איש מאחיו, רק שכינת אל חי שהוא נשמת המציאות וחיותו וקיומו הוא המחבר כל כחות המפורדות אשר בכלל הבריאה ועושה שלום ביניהם.
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Shalom, peace, is created by *shleimut*, completeness, when every unique individual element fulfills its part in completing the whole.

2. Rabbi Chaim Friedlander, Siftei Chaim: Rinat Chaim, pg. 286 – Completeness comes from each part fulfilling its unique role.

Certainly, when there is quarrelling and fighting amongst Jews, it is not a state of peace. But <i>shalom</i> has another meaning. <i>Shalom</i> comes from <i>shleimut</i> , completeness...	בודאי שאם יש מחלוקת ומריבות בעם ישראל אין זה מצב של "שלום", אבל לשלום יש מובן נוסף, "שלום" מלשון "שלימות" ...
<i>Shalom</i> does not just mean the lack of fighting. Rather, it comes when each individual recognizes and understands his own purpose and fulfills it and is pleased with it. Then, automatically there will not be any jealousy, hatred, or rivalry since each one is doing his part. It becomes clear to every person that his own completeness and that of the community depends upon each individual doing his part since that is how the totality is built. Such is the way that G-d built the Jewish people, out of Kohanim, Levites, Israelites, men and women – each type has its own unique task to accomplish. Only when each individual entity fulfills its role can the totality come to completion.	"שלום" אין מובנו רק שאין מריבות, אלא שכל אחד מכיר ומבין את תפקידו וממלא אותו ומרוצה ממנו, ממילא אין קנאה ושנאה ותחרות כי כל אחד מסור למילוי תפקידו, וברור לו שהשלימות העצמית שלו ושלימות הכלל כולו תלויה בכך שכל פרט משלים את חלקו הפרטי, ומכך נבנה הכלל, כי כך בנה הקב"ה את עם ישראל מכהנים לוויים וישראלים, אנשים ונשים, ולכל סוג ולכל פרט יש תפקיד מיוחד לו, ורק כאשר כל יחיד ויחיד משלים את חלקו נבנה הכלל השלם.

Part C. Inner Peace

Peace is not just a concept that applies to the world at large; it also applies to each individual within himself.

According to the Kabbalists, each human is a "small world" (*Olam HaKatan*), a microcosm of the "large world" (*Olam HaGadol*). Each human has to struggle to maintain an integrated wholeness, making peace and unity (שלום ושלימות) between his multi-faceted self – his physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual aspects, all of his qualities, talents and character traits, and all of his hang-ups and idiosyncrasies. So too, we have to struggle to put the world at large together into one picture.

1. Rabbi Meir Leibush (Malbim), Commentary to Bamidbar 25:12 – Making inner peace is our way to resemble G-d in His peacemaking capacity.

When all the forces within a person in his “small world” are subjugated to his G-dly soul then he resembles G-d Who creates peace in the world at large.	ובהיות כל כחות האדם בעולמו הקטן נכנעים תחת נפשו האלהית הוא דוגמת האלהות המשים שלום בעולמו הגדול.
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2. Vilna Gaon, Even Shleima, pg. 1 – Peace is the vessel for character refinement.

[Mordechai of the Purim story] “spoke peace to all his people.” Speaking peace refers to good character traits... because good character traits are the most important thing. This idea was expressed in the work Sha’arei Kedushah (Gates of Sanctity, Rabbi Chaim Vital), where it states that good character was not written as a commandment in the Torah because they are in a nutshell what the entire Torah is all about. For instance, the Sages state that “anyone who gets angry, it is as if he has worshipped idolatry” and “anyone who speaks Lashon Hara (gossip/slander) has denied the existence of G-d,” and so too all such similar statements. Peace, however, is the all-encompassing trait of good character and is the external expression of inner refinement. This is what it means when it says that “the Holy One, blessed be He, found no vessel better to contain blessing for Israel than peace.” A vessel must be able to contain something else. G-d found that only peace could contain blessing, for it is the expression of all character refinement, which is itself the basic idea behind the mitzvot.	ודובר שלום לכל זרעו ודובר שלום הוא במידות טובות... לפי שהמידות טובות הן יותר מכולן כמ”ש בשערי קדושה שלא נכתבו המידות טובות בתורה כי הן כוללין כל התורה כמו שכתוב “כל הכועס כאילו עובד עבודה זרה” וכל המספר לשון הרע ככופר בעיקר (ערכין טו) וכן כולם. ושלום הוא הכלל מכל המידות והוא הלבוש של כל המידות. וזה מה שכתוב “לא מצא הקב”ה כלי מחזיק ברכה לישראל אלא השלום” (עוקצין פ”ג) והיינו שהכלי צריך שיהיה יכול לקבל הכל ולא מצא הקב”ה מי שיהיה יכול לקבל אלא השלום, שהוא הלבוש של כל המידות והמידות הם כלל של המצוות.
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3. Rabbi Chaim Friedlander, Siftei Chaim: Rinat Chaim, pg. 286 – Inner wholeness means employing each personality trait at the appropriate time and in the appropriate measure.

The completeness of a person comes about when each aspect of his personality functions in the correct time and place. Every person is built of a variety of traits that contradict each other, for example: stinginess and generosity, compassion and cruelty, seriousness and cheerfulness. Wholeness means using each in the appropriate measure: being kind to those who deserve our kindness, being harsh or ignoring those that don’t deserve our mercy, and so on with each trait. Someone who employs each trait	כאשר כל תכונות האדם פועלות במקום ובזמן הנכון, זוהי השלימות של האדם, שהרי לאדם יש כוחות נפש שונים הסותרים זה לזה, כגון: קמצן ופזרן, רחמן ואכזר, רציני ומאידך שמח וחייכן, והשלימות היא כאשר משתמש בכל תכונה במידה הנכונה, דהיינו חסד עם מי שראוי להתחסד עמו, ואכזריות והתעלמות ממי שאינו ראוי לרחמים, כך גם בשאר התכונות, ומי שמשתמש בכל מידה במשקל המתאים הוא האדם השלם, ויש לו בעצמיותו את מידת ה”שלום”.
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in its proper proportion is a complete person and personifies the trait of “shalom.”	
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Inner peace functions to facilitate external, or social, peace.

4. Rabbi Zelig Pliskin, *Harmony with Others*, pg. 19 – The blessing of peace is that of inner and inter-personal harmony.

<p>The Hebrew word for peace is “shalom.” And this is the way that we greet people. We greet people with “shalom,” when we encounter them. And we bless people with “shalom,” when we say goodbye. And the traditional greeting when seeing someone for the first time or when seeing someone you haven't seen in a long time is, “Shalom Aleichem,” which means “peace unto you.”</p> <p>The word shalom means both peace and harmony. And it is the same word as <i>shaleim</i>, which means wholeness. When there is an atmosphere of harmony, we feel whole and complete. And when a person feels whole, he is more likely to be at peace with himself and with others.</p> <p>We bless people with peace. They should have inner peace and peace with others. When you have harmony, you function at your best. When two people work in harmony, they bring out the best in each other. And when there is harmony in an organization or a community, everyone brings out the best in each other. And we are all very different at our best than we are at our worst.</p>

Part D. כולנו יחד – Peace between Jews

On the literal level of course we wish for a peaceful existence without the need for war. But even on this literal level, the peace we ask for here is not just the cessation of war with our enemies. Peace between Jews is at least as important to our people as peace with our enemies.

1. Ramban, Commentary to Vayikra 26:6 – G-d’s blessing of “peace in the Land” refers to peace between fellow Jews.

I will grant peace in the land – that there will be peace amongst you, and one brother shall not fight another.	ונתתי שלום בארץ - שיהיה שלום ביניכם ולא תלחמו איש באחיו.
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2. Rabbi Yehonatan Eibeschitz, *Yaarot Devash*, pg. 12 – During this berachah we should pray for the unity of the Jewish people.

<p>One should pray for peace because there is no vessel for holding blessing other than peace. It is a special thing as it is the complete unity of the Jewish people. When one prays for peace, he should have in mind to pray that there should be no disputes amongst Jews, no jealousy, hatred or fighting but rather that everyone should be beloved, embraced, and unified to the greatest degree of love, brotherhood, and friendship possible. All Jews should be as one soul. One should intend to fulfill the mitzvah to “love your neighbor as yourself” which is the great principle</p>	<p>יש להתפלל על השלום כי אין כלי מחזיק ברכה אלא השלום כי הוא דבר הנחמד והוא אחדות גמור של ישראל וכאשר יתפלל על השלום יתפלל שלא יהיה מחלוקת בישראל ולא יהיה קנאה ושנאה ותחרות כי כלם יהיו אהובים אחוזים ואחודים בתכלית היחוד ואהבה ואחווה וריעות ויהיה כל ישראל נפש אחת ויכוין לקיים ואהבת לרעך כמוך שהוא כלל כל התורה.</p>
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of the Torah.	
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Part E. The Torah of Peace

In this berachah we mention that “with the light of Your countenance You gave us, L-rd our G-d, the Torah of life.” Peace is central to the Torah’s message and the kind of life it envisages.

1. Mishlei (Proverbs) 3:17 – The way of the Torah is peaceful.

Its ways are ways of pleasantness and all its paths are peace.	דרכיה דרכי נעם וכל נתיבותיה שלום:
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Since peace is so basic to the Torah’s approach to life, the Torah itself could only be given to the Jewish people while we were in a state of unity.

2. Rashi, Commentary to Shemot 19:2 – The Torah was received by the Jewish people when they were in a state of unity with one another.

They had departed from Rephidim and had arrived in the Sinai Desert, camping in the wilderness. Israel camped opposite the mountain.	ויסעו מרפידים ויבאו מדבר סיני ויחנו במדבר ויחן שם ישראל נגד ההר:
Israel camped – [Using a singular verb, indicating they were] as one person with one heart.	ויחן שם ישראל - כאיש אחד בלב אחד.

3. Midrash Tanchuma Yashan, Yitro 9 – We can receive the Torah (whose ways are peaceful and pleasant) if we can embody the quality of peace.

“It’s [the Torah’s] ways are ways of pleasantness.” G-d wanted to give the Torah to the Jews as soon as they left Egypt. But they were arguing with each other and continually saying, “Let us appoint a new leader and return to Egypt”... When they came to Rephidim they were all equal and became united... G-d said, “The entire Torah is peace. To whom should I give it? To a nation that loves peace.” This is the meaning of the end of the verse, “And all its paths are peace.”	דרכיה דרכי נועם וגו'. ביקש הקב"ה ליתן תורה לישראל בשעה שיצאו ממצרים, והיו חולקין זה על זה והיו אומרים בכל שעה נתנה ראש ונשובה מצרימה... כשבאו לרפידים הושוו כולם ונעשו אגודה אחת... אמר הקב"ה התורה כולה שלום, ולמי אתננה לאומה שאוהבת שלום, הוי וכל נתיבותיה שלום (משלי ג:יז).
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4. Rabbi Chaim Shmulevitz, Sichot Mussar, pg. 152 (based on the Ohr HaChaim) – Part of preparing oneself to receive the Torah is creating unity by doing acts of kindness for others.

The third component of preparation for Shavuot is “The Jewish people encamped there opposite the mountain.” This represents the unification of individuals with a sincere, full heart... This is why the Torah writes, “ <i>vayichan Yisrael</i> ” (Israel camped) in the singular to demonstrate that the	והכנה שלישית לקבלת התורה, “ויחנו שם ישראל נגד ההר”, וכ' האוה"ח וז"ל “וענין ג', יעוד חכמים בהתחברות בלב שלם ותמים... וכנגד זה אמר “ויחן ישראל” לשון יחיד, שנעשו כולן יחד כאיש אחד [בלב אחד], והן עתה ראויים הם לקבלת התורה.”
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<p>Jewish nation was now unified like one person [with one heart] and as such they deserved to receive the Torah.</p> <p>For each person assisted his neighbor in finding a good encampment and in providing for his physical needs. This was the third aspect of their preparation for receiving the Torah.</p>	<p>כי כל אחד עסק בהכנת מקום טוב לחבירו, זה היה כל עסקם בחניה ובצרכיה, והיא היתה הכנתם לקבלת התורה.</p>
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Key Themes of שלום – Shalom.

- Peace is not just a berachah; it is the vessel for holding all the other berachot we have requested in the Shemoneh Esrei.
- Real peace is not just the cessation of hostilities or lack of dispute. That kind of peace is only a byproduct of a deeper completeness that comes about by each individual knowing and fulfilling his or her unique role.
- Peace is not only external, found in nature or society. It can also be achieved internally by employing one's own personality traits in the proper proportion, each trait in the right time and place.
- Peace amongst Jews is at least as important as peace between us and our enemies.
- Peace is also the very essence of the Torah and its vision for a world of wholeness.

Chapter Four

Closing Prayers and Personal Requests

אלוקי נצור לשוני מרע (Elokai Netzor)

יהיו לרצון אמרי פי והגיון לבי לפניך יהוה צורי וגאלי (תהילים יט:טו)

*May the expressions of my mouth and the thoughts of my heart find favor before You,
G-d, my Rock and my Redeemer.*

אֱלֹהֵי נָצַר לְשׁוֹנִי מִרַע, וּשְׁפָתִי מִדְּבַר מַרְמָה, וְלִמְקַלְלֵי נַפְשִׁי תָדֹם, וְנַפְשִׁי כַּעֲפָר לְכָל תְּהִיָּה, פֶּתַח לְבִי
בְּתוֹרָתְךָ, וְאַחֲרֵי מִצְוֹתֶיךָ תִּרְדּוּף נַפְשִׁי. וְכָל-הַקָּמִים עָלַי לְרָעָה, מְהֵרָה הִפֵּר עֲצָתָם וְקַלְקַל
מַחֲשַׁבְּתָם. ָם

עֲשֵׂה לְמַעַן שְׁמֶךָ, עֲשֵׂה לְמַעַן יְמִינְךָ, עֲשֵׂה לְמַעַן קִדְשְׁךָ, עֲשֵׂה לְמַעַן תּוֹרָתְךָ, לְמַעַן יִחַלְצוּן יְדִידֶיךָ.
הוֹשִׁיעָה יְמִינְךָ וְעַנֵּנִי.

יהיו לרצון אמרי פי והגיון לבי לפניך יהוה צורי וגאלי (תהילים יט:טו) עֲשֵׂה שְׁלוֹם בְּמִרוֹמָיו. הוּא
יַעֲשֶׂה שְׁלוֹם עָלֵינוּ וְעַל כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל. וְאַמְרוּ אָמֵן:

יְהִי רָצוֹן מִלְּפָנֶיךָ, יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְאַלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ, שִׂיבֶנָּה בְּיָדֶיךָ הַמְּקַדֵּשׁ בְּמַהֲרָה בְּיָמֵינוּ וְתַן חֶלְקֵנוּ בְּתוֹרָתְךָ.
וְיִשָּׁם נֶעֱבָדְךָ בִּירְאָה כִּימֵי עוֹלָם וּכְשָׁנִים קְדָמוֹנִיּוֹת. וְעֲרֹכָה לִיהוָה מִנְחַת יְהוּדָה וִירוּשָׁלַיִם כִּימֵי עוֹלָם
וּכְשָׁנִים קְדָמוֹנִיּוֹת (מלאכי ג, ד)

*My G-d, guard my tongue from evil and my lips from speaking deceitfully. To those who curse me, let me soul be silent;
and let my soul be like dust to everyone. Open my heart to Your Torah, then my soul will pursue Your
commandments. As for all those who design evil against me, speedily nullify their counsel and disrupt their design. Act
for Your Name's sake; act for Your right hand's sake; act for Your sanctity's sake; act for Your Torah's sake. That
Your beloved ones may be given rest; let Your right hand save, and respond to me. May the expressions of my mouth
and the thoughts of my heart find favor before You, G-d my Rock and my Redeemer. He Who makes peace in His
heights, may He make peace upon us, and upon all Israel. Now respond: Amen.*

*May it be Your will, L-rd our G-d and the G-d of our forefathers, that the Holy Temple be rebuilt, speedily in our
days. Grant us our share in Your Torah, and may we serve You there with reverence, as in days of old and former
years. Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to G-d, as in days of old and in former years.*

The Talmud (Berachot 16b-17a) lists eleven sages each of whom composed a personal supplication for the end of the Amidah. Of these eleven, the prayer of Mar b'rei d'Ravina – אֱלֹהֵי נָצַר – has been universally adopted as the one to be recited after the Shemoneh Esrei. At first glance, it may not be clear why Mar brei d'Ravina's words were preferred over the others, but a careful reading of the Talmudic text offers a clue.

In reference to each of the other sages, the Talmud says that his supplication was “after his prayer” implying that their prayers were separate from the just-concluded Amidah. In describing that of Mar brei d'Ravina, however, the Talmud says, “while he was finishing his prayers,” which implies that his supplication was a continuation of the preceding verse, “May the words of my mouth find favor.”

His prayer was thus an extension of the Shemoneh Esrei as he pleaded for purity of speech (Rabbi Avrohom Chaim Feuer, Shemoneh Esrei, pg. 277).

Part A. Personal Requests in the Shemoneh Esrei

The Introduction to this Amidah Companion mentioned that there is plenty of room for unstructured, personal expression within the Shemoneh Esrei itself. The Gemara (Avodah Zarah 7b) teaches that one should ask G-d for one's needs in the berachah of Shema Koleinu. The Gemara continues and adds that although this is true, if one wants to add a relevant request at the end of each berachah he may do so. Then the Gemara quotes another statement that although one should ask for one's needs in Shema Koleinu, if he has a family member who is ill, he should pray for him in birchat Refa'einu. If he needs to earn a livelihood, he should ask for it in Bareich Aleinu. The Gemara finishes with a statement that after Shemoneh Esrei (i.e., after the main berachot, but before concluding with *Yibeyu l'ratzon imrei fi* after *Elokai Netzor*) one may add whatever he wants, even as much as the entire liturgy of Yom Kippur (Rabbi Dovid Lewin, Kollel Ahavas Yehonoson, Parshat Toldot, 2012).

1. Rabbi Chaim Friedlander, Sifte Chaim: Rinat Chaim, pg. 306 – Adding personal requests during the Shemoneh Esrei.

<p>After the completion of the blessings of the Shemoneh Esrei that the Great Assembly established (Talmud, Berachot 33a), the Amoraim added more requests (Ibid 16b - 17a), and we recite the prayer written by Mar, the son of Ravina. Until we recite for the second time, "May the expressions of my mouth..." all the requests are connected to the Shemoneh Esrei. For it is codified in the Shulchan Aruch (Aruch Chayim 119:1): If someone wants to add something related to any of the middle berachot, he may do so. How? If someone is ill, one prays for him in the blessing of 'Refa'einu - Heal us'... In the blessing of 'He Who hears prayer,' one can ask for any need, for this blessing includes all of one's requests. However, the Shulchan Aruch continues (Ibid 119:2): One should not be lengthy in expressing one's personal needs. Nevertheless, at the end of the Shemoneh Esrei ... one may make requests whether on behalf of oneself or others, whether for his personal needs or communal needs (Ibid 119:1). As it is written in the Talmud (Avodah Zarah 8a): One may even recite the prayers of Yom Kippur after the Shemoneh Esrei. Therefore, we add the request of "My G-d, guard my tongue..."</p>	<p>אחר סיום ברכות השמו"ע-אותם תיקנו לנו אנשי כנסת הגדולה (ברכות לג.) הוסיפו האמוראים בקשות נוספות (ברכות טז: - יז.), ואנו אומרים את תפילתו של מר בריה דרבנא, כי כל עוד לא אמרנו "יהיו לרצון וגו'" מצטרפות כל הבקשות לשמו"ע, שהרי "אם רצה להוסיף בכל ברכה מהאמצעיות מעין הברכה מוסיף.</p> <p>כיצד – היה לו חולה, מבקש עליו רחמים בברכת רפאנו...וב'שומע תפילה' יכול לשאול כל צרכיו, שהיא כוללת כל הבקשות" (שו"ע, קיט, ס"א), אלא ש"יש מי שאומר שכשמוסיף בברכה לצורך יחיד לא יאריך" (שם, ס"ב), אבל "בסוף התפילה... יכול לשאול בין בלשון יחיד בין בלשון רבים, בין צרכיו ממש בין צרכי רבים (שם, ס"א), וכפי שכתוב בגמ' (ע"ז ח.) "אבל אם בא לומר אחר תפילתו אפילו כסדר יום הכיפורים אומר. "לכן אנו מוסיפים את בקשת 'אלוקי נצור' וכו'.</p>
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The Tzlach explains why expressing personal prayers is especially appropriate at the conclusion of the Amidah.

2. Rabbi Avrohom Chaim Feuer, Shemoneh Esrei, pg. 272 – By the end of the Shemoneh Esrei, a person is most capable of expressing personal requests.

Prayer is an experience that leaves a strong impact on the soul. When one recites the Amidah properly, with intense feeling and devotion, he concludes this intimate encounter in a spirit of ecstasy that elevates his soul. Before the Men of the Great Assembly composed the uniform text of the Amidah, prayer was a spontaneous, personal outpouring of the heart. Even after they introduced a standard prayer text, their purpose was not to stifle spontaneity but to inspire it. Every blessing of the Amidah ignites a spark in the soul, and when all the blessings are completed, the soul is aflame with passionate love for G-d. The tongue has been freed; the heart has been opened – now is the time for the soul to overflow with personal petitions and praises (Tzlach, Berachot 16b).

Below are general guidelines on expressing personal prayers during the Amidah in general, during the berachah of Shema Koleinu, and at the end of Elokai Netzor.

3. Rabbi Binyamin Forst, Halacha Hotline of the Five Towns and Far Rockaway, Making Personal Requests during the Weekday Shemoneh Esrei – Personal requests during the Amidah.

- Inserting personal requests in Shemoneh Esrei can enhance one's davening immensely.
- One may make requests in a language other than Hebrew, if necessary.
- Personal requests should not be made in the first three or last three berachot of Shemoneh Esrei.
- One may make requests in the middle berachot of Shemoneh Esrei as long as they relate to the topic of the berachah, and the need is current.

4. Ibid. – Personal requests in Shema Koleinu.

Since the berachah of Shema Koleinu is very general in nature, one may insert therein any type of request – for current or future needs (Mishnah Berurah 119:1), personal or public (Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 119:1). One generally inserts the request before the words “*ki Attah shomei'a tefillat...*” Although one may insert any request in this berachah, inserting numerous lengthy requests might cause one to be unable to respond properly to Kedushah or Kaddish. Accordingly, it is better to insert only short requests in this berachah and to say longer requests at the end of Elokai Netzor, as will be explained below (Chayei Adam 24:19.; M.B. 122:8). This concern is relevant primarily for one who is davening with a minyan; one who is davening at home (as many women do) may take more time making personal requests in the berachah of Shema Koleinu, as missing Kaddish and Kedushah is not a concern. Still, lengthy requests should rather be recited at the end of Elokai Netzor (see S.A. O.C. 119:2).

5. Ibid. – Making personal requests at the end of Elokai Netzor.

In many siddurim, the *pasuk* (verse) of *Yibeyu l'ratzon...* is printed immediately before the paragraph of Elokai Netzor. It is proper for one to recite this *pasuk* at that point, since after reciting it, one is allowed to say many of the responses in Kaddish and Kedushah even before saying Elokai Netzor (S.A. 122:2; M.B. 122:7).

As mentioned above, it is important that one not miss responding to Kaddish and Kedushah as a

result of one's personal tefillot. Therefore, the *poskim* (Halachic authorities) advise that rather than saying the bulk of one's personal requests in the middle of Shemoneh Esrei, one should recite them at the end of Elokai Netzor. (Generally, one inserts the request immediately before the second pasuk of *Yihayu l'ratzon* – May the expressions of my mouth and the thoughts of my heart find favor before You, G-d my Rock and my Redeemer.) By inserting the requests in Elokai Netzor, one is able to say many of the responses in Kaddish and Kedushah, should the opportunity arise (M.B. 122:8); see note. If there is no concern of missing out on responding to Kaddish and Kedushah, a few short requests may indeed be inserted in the middle berachot of Shemoneh Esrei.

Note: One may (and should) take one's time to recite the Shemoneh Esrei, even if doing so will cause one to be unable to respond to Kaddish and Kedushah. There is no need to recite the Shemoneh Esrei quickly in order to be able to respond to Kaddish and Kedushah.

Part B. Stepping Back and Looking Forward to a Rebuilt Jerusalem

1. Rabbi Avrohom Chaim Feuer, Shemoneh Esrei, pg. 281 – Taking three steps backward.

[After completing one's personal requests and saying the verse "*Yihayu l'ratzon imrei fi...*" for the second time] the supplicant bows like a servant taking leave from his master (Orach Chaim 123:1 Mishnah Berurah) and, while bowing, takes three steps backward. Various reasons are given for these three steps.

- When one prays before G-d, the place where he stands becomes holy and the *Shechinah* (Divine Presence) rests over it. Upon concluding his prayer, he steps out of this holy area (Shibbolei Halekhet).
- The daily payer is like a sacrificial offering. When the priests left the altar they had to step across three rows of stones to reach the ramp back to the courtyard (Rav Hai Gaon).
- The Sages teach that Nebuchadnezzar once took three steps in honor of G-d (see Maharsha, Sanhedrin 96a), and was rewarded by victory in his attempt to destroy the Temple. In response, we too take three steps to pay honor to G-d's Presence (Mishnah Berurah 123:2).

After having gone three steps backward, the supplicant bows to his left, saying, *עושה שלום במרומיו*, He Who makes peace in His heights; bows to his right, saying, *הוא יעשה שלום עלינו*, may He make peace upon us; then bows straight ahead and finishes with *ועל כל ישראל ואמרו אמן*, and upon all Israel; and now respond Amen. We first bow to the left because, with G-d before us, our left is His right, and the right side is always honored first (Bais Yosef 123).

Rabbi Munk comments that the bow to G-d's right (our left) symbolizes G-d's spirit of mercy, represented by the angel Michael who stands at the right of G-d's throne. The bow to G-d's left (our right) symbolizes G-d's spirit of exact justice, represented by the angel Gabriel, who stands to the left of the throne. Finally we bow forward, to G-d Himself, acknowledging that ultimately He resolves all conflicts and unifies all forces in the universe.

May it be Your will, L-rd our G-d and the G-d of our forefathers, that the Holy Temple be rebuilt, speedily in our days. Grant us our share in Your Torah...

Why are the concluding words of the Shemoneh Esrei a prayer for rebuilding the Temple and granting us a portion in Torah study?

2. Ibid., pg. 283-4 – The connection between the Temple and the Torah.

Rabbi Moshe Isserles (Rama) writes in his gloss to Orach Chaim (123:1): Today our prayers are a substitute for the sacrificial offerings in the Holy Temple. Therefore, at the very end of the Amidah we make one final plea to G-d to rebuild the Temple, so we may actually serve Him with real offerings and not merely verbal substitutes.

Vilna Gaon (commentary to Shir HaShirim 6:4) explains that we juxtapose our request for the reconstruction of the Temple with a request for our share in Torah, because as long as the Temple is in ruins and the Jews are exiled the quality and quantity of our Torah studies is drastically diminished... With the Temple restored, we will once again be able to study Torah to the highest degree.

Finally, we conclude the Shemoneh Esrei mentioning that sacrifices will be restored with the Temple Service to concretize in us **שאיין מציאות זולתו** – that there is no reality in the world other than G-d.

3. Maharal, Gevurot Hashem, Ch. 69 – Sacrifices demonstrate that there is nothing besides G-d.

The entire matter of sacrifices is to demonstrate that G-d, may He be blessed, is One in the world, and there is no power besides Him... For sacrifices demonstrate His unity, in that compared to His greatness all things are considered nothing, and are annulled before Him, and everything comes back to Him, for there is nothing that is not from His kindness... This is [what is referred to as] His completeness, that there is no existence besides His.

כל ענין הקרבנות הוא להורות כי השם ית' יחיד בעולם ואפס זולתו ... כי הקרבנות כמו שהם להורות על אחדותו, שכל הנמצאים במדרגת רוממותו ומעלתו נחשבים לאפס, והכל שב אליו, שאין דבר נמצא זולת מחסדי ה' וזהו שלמותו ית' שאין מציאות זולתו.

Key Themes of **אלוקי נצור** – Closing Prayers and Personal Requests.

- The prayer of Mar b'rei d'Ravina has been universally adopted as the one to be recited after the Shemoneh Esrei which pleads for purity of speech.
- There is plenty of room for unstructured, personal expression within the Shemoneh Esrei itself. One may make requests in the middle berachot of Shemoneh Esrei as long as they relate to the topic of the berachah, and the need is current. At the end of the Shemoneh Esrei, one may make requests on behalf of oneself or others, whether for personal needs or communal needs.
- One may (and should) take one's time to recite the Shemoneh Esrei. There is no need to recite the Shemoneh Esrei quickly in order to be able to respond to Kaddish and Kedushah.

Conclusion

We Count Big-Time in G-d's Master Plan

Rabbi Reuven Leuchter, Creating Dialogue with Hashem, pg. 100 – Each Shemoneh Esrei should strengthen the realization that G-d is interested in each of us and our vital role in the world.

Prayer is a mitzvah which accompanies us throughout life's stages. As a person evolves over time, maturing from self-centered adolescence to caring about the world around him, and on to adulthood and the wisdom of old age – so do one's prayers evolve and mature, in accordance with one's situation in life. Thus we find that the greatest leaders throughout the generations spent their whole lives enhancing their prayer, because every stage in life affords new insight into our ongoing dialogue with G-d, and a fresh perspective on His interest in us at all times.

This is also why, throughout the generations, those who prayed with devout consciousness did so neither by rote nor by following a prescribed text of how one should pray. At times they prayed quickly, at other times slowly; at times from a siddur and at times simply by closing their eyes. Prayer is termed *chayey sha'ab*, something transient – transient not in the sense of being short-lived, but in the sense of constantly changing and progressing. The goal is to be moved such that each time we pray it is a unique experience, unlike any other prayer.

My intention in these essays [and ours in this Companion – Ed.] was to enable people to develop a more mature perspective in their approach to tefillah, which in turn will enable them to see more and more how G-d is genuinely interested in us and wants to bestow goodness upon us. Ultimately, I hope people will emerge from prayer seeing that our lives are significant and play an integral role in G-d's Master Plan. For there is no greater joy than knowing that G-d is interested in us, and that we play an indispensable role in His plan for the world.