

Tefillah Focus Of The Week:

שמנה עשרה

Prayer's Secret Formula

**MEANING:** The simple translation of the prayer

Blessed are You, Hashem, our G-d and the G-d of our Patriarchs, G-d of Avraham, G-d of Yitzchak, and G-d of Yaakov.

ברוך אתה ה' אלקינו  
ואלקי אבותינו,  
אלקי אברהם, אלקי  
יצחק, ואלקי יעקב.

**WORD TO THE WISE:** Meaning within the word



Like the pre-set numbers of a combination lock, the established combination of words that comprise *Shemoneh Esrei* open the door to all of the essential, life-sustaining blessings. Clearly, one must learn and understand these words well.

ברוך - We acknowledge that Hashem is blessed or praised, meaning that He is perfect and complete and offer thanks for all that He bestows upon us (*Sefer HaChinuch* 430). Nefesh HaChaim (*Shaar* 2:2) states that Hashem does not need our blessing. Rather, the word ברוך is derived from “*bereicha*” — a pool or spring of flowing water. That means that ברוך אתה You [Hashem] are the source of Blessing. When one recites ברוך he is proclaiming that G-d is

the source of all blessing.

אתה - When a person says אתה ... he is speaking with the King of kings “face to face,” as it were. The Chofetz Chaim points out that אתה — You [Hashem], refers to the fact that one beseeches Hashem *directly* in prayer (Cited in *Halichos Shlomo (Tefillah)*, page 362).

ה' - *Master of All*, Who always was, is, and will be. The word ‘Hashem’ in *Shemoneh Esrei* is actually *written* with the letters ‘yud’ ‘heh’ ‘vav’ and ‘heh’. It is *pronounced* as if the letters are ‘aleph’ ‘daleh’ ‘nun’ and ‘yud’. When one mentions the Divine Name, he should have in mind the meaning of the Name as it is read, referring to His Mastery and that He is the Master of all creation (*Siman* 5:1).

**THEME:**

An essential concept of the prayer

*Within the Words*

The words of the *Shemoneh Esrei*, composed by the Men of the Great Assembly, are embedded with the power to draw Hashem’s bounty and *blessings* down from heaven.

**INSIGHT:**

Deeper meanings of the theme

*Eternally State-of-the-Art*

One hundred and twenty of the greatest computer scientists in the world are brought together and given unlimited access to the most advanced technology available. They are joined by visionaries able to discern every possible requirement of future generations of computer users. Their mission is to write a program for a supercomputer designed to remain state-of-the-art for all time.

Imagine — were such a development even possible — the infinite power of this remarkable device! This portrayal is but a glimpse in contemporary terms of the extraordinary process which culminated in the sacred and ever-powerful words of *Shemoneh Esrei*.

The text of *Shemoneh Esrei* was composed through Divine inspiration by the 120

elders who comprised the Men of the Great Assembly — among them, many prophets — at the beginning of the era of the Second *Bais HaMikdash*. Four hundred years later, after the *Beis HaMikdash* was destroyed, the text was rearranged into our current format under the direction of Rabban Gamliel, as the original sequence had been forgotten.

From their soaring spiritual heights, the Men of the Great Assembly grasped the inner powers hidden within each word of each blessing. They understood the sweeping cosmic effects of each letter and word combination, granting them the ability to formulate each prayer into a mighty force whose impact could shake the very heavens (*Beur Halachah, Siman* 101, *Se'if* 4, s.v. “*Yachol L'hispalleh*”).

**VISUALIZE:**

Images that bring the prayer to life

*Knowing Before Whom We Stand*

A student of Rabbi Zundel of Salant once came upon his rebbe as he was practicing the detailed bows and bends performed in *Shemoneh Esrei*. Rabbi Zundel later explained that, like a member of the royal guard, he was performing drills



to perfect his actions before being reviewed by the King.

“I cannot wait until *Shemoneh Esrei* itself before I think about how to make each move, for at that time, as I stand in

the throne room of the King of Kings, requesting all that I need in life, I will be too overwhelmed...”

With this explanation, the rebbe taught what it means to truly understand that the words of *Shemoneh Esrei* have the power to draw Hashem’s bounty and *blessings* down from heaven.

**Try This!**

Prayer is often compared to an important meeting with someone of great authority who has the power to grant you what you need. A boss, a bank officer, a judge: think of someone in your life who holds some kind of power over your life, and imagine you were about to meet with him or her. The tone of your first few words with which you would open the conversation would be well planned out. Carry that sense of awe and hope into the first words you say to Hashem in *Shemoneh Esrei*.

**Did You Know**

**Dressing for the Occasion**

The unique intimacy of the direct, “personal” one-on-one encounter with the King of kings during *Shemoneh Esrei* is reflected in the laws that surround the *Shemoneh Esrei*. The *Shulchan Aruch* (*Siman* 74: 6) rules that if a man’s clothing covers only his hips and downwards, he is forbidden to recite *Shemoneh Esrei* until he is fully dressed, as one would not appear before a king without proper clothing. The clothes of the *chazan* must be long enough to cover legs (*Mishneh Berurah* 53: 13).