

Tefillah Focus Of The Week:

שמנה עשרה

Three Pathways to Hashem

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



Reinforcing the bond with our Forefathers through this prayer not only calls upon their merit, it also calls upon us to identify our own path to spiritual greatness. As we recite their names, we are reminded that each served Hashem in their own distinct way.

אלקי יצחק - *Gevurah v'yirah*, mightiness and fear, characterized Yitzchak Avinu. By calling upon his inner strength and fear of Heaven, he exemplified the power of Hashem for the world to see.

ואלקי יעקב - The primary character trait of Yaakov Avinu was *emes v'tiferes*, truth and perfect harmony. His personality combined the seemingly contradictory traits of Avraham's benevolence and Yitzchak's mightiness and fear (Michtav M'Eliyahu, Volume 5, pages 51).

As we recite the names of the Avos, we strive to awaken their traits within ourselves. In doing so, we will arrive at our own individual source of strength with which to perform our own unique service to Hashem.

אלקי אברהם - The *chesed* of Avraham Avinu — the benevolence that he displayed to others — was his core characteristic, through which he emulated the *chesed* of Hashem. Because he perceived Hashem's existence through the magnificent gift of Creation and Hashem's continual benevolence, he followed this path to bring Hashem's light into the world.

THEME:

An essential concept of the prayer

The Avos Paved the Way

We connect to Hashem in prayer through the traits that the Avos embodied.

INSIGHT:

Deeper meanings of the theme

Opening the Lines of Communication

The *Birchas Avos*, in which we mention Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov, exemplifies the unique relationship that our forefathers formed with Hashem. The Gemara (Berachos 26b) describes how each Patriarch introduced G-dliness to the world in his own way. Avraham introduced Shacharis, Yitzchak introduced Mincha and Yaakov introduced Maariv.

Over the generations, we have benefited from the merit of their relationship with Hashem. Rav Elya Lopian explains that the role of the Patriarchs was similar to that of the pioneers of the telegraph and telephone industry. The early inventors and engineers toiled to build the equipment and lay down the wires for a vast communication system that was later available to everyone. Similarly, before the Patriarchs, mankind did not know how to recognize and communicate with its Creator. The Patriarchs

demonstrated how one can detect the imprint of the Creator on every facet of nature, and express his admiration and gratitude through prayer.

Moshe Rabbeinu invoked the merits of our forefathers when he pleaded that Hashem forgive the Jewish nation for the sin of worshipping the Golden Calf, as the verse (*Shemos 32:13*) states: "Remember for the sake of Avraham, Yitzchok and Yisroel (Yaakov) Your servants to whom You swore by Yourself, and You told them 'I shall increase your offspring like the stars of heaven...'"

If Moshe Rabbeinu felt compelled to remember the merits of our forefathers in his prayers, then without doubt, we too must realize that mentioning the *Avos* in our prayers is a merit for our generation. (Adapted from *Shemoneh Esrei*, Rabbi Avrohom Chaim Feuer, ArtScroll, Page 50).

VISUALIZE:

Images that bring the prayer to life

My Father's Friend

Chaim's father, Avrohom, brings him into his business selling wholesale diamonds. After several months of learning to evaluate diamonds and negotiate prices, Chaim is ready for his first solo buying trip. His father sends him off to India, where he is to visit several major diamond manufacturers and come home with merchandise for his father's customers. When Chaim arrives in Bombay, he is overwhelmed by the noisy,



crowded city, the strange customs and scenery. He fears that as a stranger in a strange land, he will be unable to properly negotiate.

But his father Avrohom is an old and valued customer of these merchants. Thus, at every office Chaim visits, he introduces himself as Avrohom's son and is immediately welcomed. The merchants

give him good deals, inquire after his accommodations and his comfort, and do all they can to make sure that he has everything he needs to conduct his business.

Likewise, when we announce ourselves to Hashem in the name of our forefathers, we invoke His love for them and benefit from their merit. To the extent that we exemplify and claim this relationship, we lay claim to all the benefits Hashem wishes to bestow on us to make our "business trip" in this world a successful one.

Try This!

▶ Have you ever discovered G-d? There are times in the lives of all believing people when they feel an epiphany, a sudden "Aha!" moment in which Hashem seems right there at hand. Our Avos experienced that epiphany as their daily, normal state of mind. Each, through his predominant trait, was able to keep a live line of communication open with the Creator. Imagine tapping into that level of connection, coming to us from three different sources, when you say the names of the Avos in prayer.

Did You Know

▶ *How to Bow*

We begin the first blessing of *Shemoneh Esrei* by bowing. When saying the word "*boruch*" one bends his knees. When saying "*Atah*" he must bend forward in a bow. He remains bent until he reaches the Divine Name, Hashem, whereupon he should raise himself to an erect position. (*Mishneh Berurah, Siman 113:12*).

Rav Tanchum said in the name of Rav Yehoshua ben Levi that the number 18, referring to *Shemoneh Esrei*'s 18 blessings, corresponds to the fact that one who recites *Shemoneh Esrei* must bow low enough for all 18 vertebrae of the spine (those below the neck) to protrude. That demonstrates that every part of our body, including our thoughts, is involved in beseeching Hashem. (Note: Originally, the *Shemoneh Esrei* contained 18 blessings. At a later date, a 19th blessing, *v'lamalshinim*, was added by Rabban Gamliel [Berachos 28b]).

Bowing also symbolizes humility, as this blessing summarizes Hashem's praises and His powers (*Bais Elokim*). Genuine humility allows us to recognize that whatever we receive in life is a gift from Hashem and not something which we are entitled to receive.