

Tefillah Focus Of The Week:

שמנה עשרה

The Torah and Teshuvah

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

Bring us back, 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, Hashem, Who desires repentance.

השיבנו אבינו  
לתורתך, וקרבונו  
מלכנו לעבודתך,  
והחזירנו בתשובה שלמה  
לפניך. ברוך אתה ה',  
הרוצה בתשובה.

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



This blessing, השיבנו אבינו לתורתך "Bring us back, our Father, to Your Torah," and the one סלח לנו אבינו כי חטאנו "Forgive us our Father, for we have erred" are the only ones in *Shemoneh Esrei* which include reference to Hashem as our Father. The following story (*Sotah*, 10b) of the death of King David's son, Avsholom, helps explain why this is so.

Upon hearing about the death of his son, King David ascended to the upper portion of the chamber of his palace, and cried for mercy. As he went, he cried out "my son" eight times. Seven times he cried "my son" to bring

Avsholom down from the seven chambers of *Gehennom*. The last cry of "my son" was to bring Avsholom to *Olam Haba*, the World to Come.

Why did King David cry for Avsholom, the son who wanted to kill his father and take his throne? The answer is that no matter what a child has done, a loving father always feels for his child.

Hashem is our loving father and we are His children. When we say "השיבנו אבינו", we are beseeching our loving Father in Heaven to bring us close, despite our past transgressions. We know that Hashem wants us to do *teshuvah*. We, as His children, must desire to return to Him. We begin the process by asking for His help.

**THEME:**

An essential concept of the prayer

*The Way Back*

Torah learning is the vehicle that brings us back to Hashem in *teshuvah*.

**INSIGHT:**

Deeper meanings of the theme

*Returns Are Always Accepted*

This fifth blessing is about *teshuvah*. Yet, we beseech Hashem השיבנו אבינו לתורתך "Bring us back our Father to **Your Torah**." *Alei Shur* (Volume 1, Page 236) explains that the most essential ingredient in *teshuvah* is Torah knowledge. Returning to Hashem depends upon Torah study.

Torah study is the vehicle through which we can return fully to Hashem. It is impossible to do *teshuvah* and to correct the mistakes and sins we commit in the different areas of Jewish life unless we know their applicable laws and the laws of *teshuvah*. If one does not know what is right and what is wrong, how does he know whether *teshuvah* is needed? Therefore, in an area in which one feels he is weak (i.e. prayer, making blessings, the laws of Shabbos, human

relationships) one should put himself on the path to *teshuvah* by studying the applicable laws. "There is no solution other than studying the laws," says the Chofetz Chaim. "There must be a set time each day, whether a lot or a little, to learn the relevant laws."

Even if someone has neglected Torah study for an extended period of time, he can return. The Midrash (*Shemos Rabah*, Chapter 33, Posuk 7) tells us that the Torah is "the heritage of the community of Yaakov," meaning that it is always there for every child of Yaakov to retrieve as his rightful possession. Therefore, we pray: השיבנו אבינו לתורתך, for Hashem will always receive us whenever we come back to study His Torah (*Abudraham on Hashivainu*).

**VISUALIZE:**

Images that bring the prayer to life

**Aha!**

It was a Shabbos morning. Zev sat lethargically in his seat in shul, getting comfortable while the Rav prepared to speak. "Good," he thought, "a chance to relax for ten or 15 minutes." He had carefully chosen his seat in the back of the shul, where his drooping head and fluttering eyelids would not be a direct affront to the rabbi. Zev came to shul every day as he should, but he couldn't call himself a particularly spiritual or inspired individual. On this Shabbos morning,



however, Zev found his attention drifting back to the Rav's words. He listened as the Rav began dissecting a portion of the week's Torah reading. There was so much wisdom in the Rav's point. It was so very timely, so relevant to his life, and yet amazingly, the words had traveled through millennia to arrive in that shul at that moment. Then and there, Zev suddenly grasped the Torah

as the communication of G-d to His people. It was the first surge of life-blood in Zev's avodas Hashem, and the start of a long upward journey.

When we take to heart what the Torah is – G-d's communication to us – we naturally become concerned with what it has to say. It is as if we receive a letter that drifts down from heaven, addressed to us, saying "This is what G-d wants from YOU." Anyone with any desire to be close to Hashem would surely read that letter and follow its directions to perfection.

**Try This!**

► In this blessing of the *Shemoneh Esrei*, we ask Hashem to return us to "Your Torah." We thereby emphasize that the Torah is an expression of Hashem. It's His, and through it, we can become close to Him too. Think of this aspect of the blessing when you say השיבנו אבינו לתורתך.

**Did You Know**

► **When You Need an Immediate Answer**

If one is reciting *Shemoneh Esrei* and is in doubt of a law concerning the *Shemoneh Esrei*, he may go and look it up in a *sefer* (Mishnah Berurah 104:2 and *Kaf HaChayim* 96:11 citing *Chayei Adam*). If he has no other choice, he may even ask another person what the *halachah* is (Mishnah Berurah 104:2). Although some (see *Ha'elef Lecha Shelomo*, *Siman* 50; and *Eimek Berachah*, page 7) disagree with the allowance for asking a question and even just going to look up the answer in a *sefer*, they rule that it may be relied upon if failing to resolve a question might invalidate the person's *Shemoneh Esrei* (*Beis Baruch* on *Chayei Adam* 25:22).