

Tefillah Focus Of The Week:

שמנה עשרה

Our Eternal Protection

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

Blessed are You, Hashem, Shield of Avraham.

ברוך אתה ה',  
מגן אברהם.

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

This part of *Shemoneh Esrei* refers to when Avraham Avinu conquered the four kings who invaded the Land of Canaan. Hashem granted Avraham the special protection of a shield, so that even if his enemies shot arrows at him, he would remain unscathed. "Al tirah Avram. Anochi magen loch. Secharcha harbei me'od -- Fear not, Avram, I am your shield. Your reward (spiritual and material) is exceedingly great," says Hashem (*Bereishis* 15:1). As Hashem told Avraham, "al tira", do not fear, for you are completely shielded and nothing can penetrate your armor (*Michtav M'Eliyahu*, Volume 3, page 84).

*Yalkut Shimoni* (*Bereishis* 15:1) explains that the

word מגן in Aramaic means, "free." Avraham was concerned that because of his miraculous victory over the four kings, all his merits were consumed. Therefore, Hashem reassured him that, because he fought for Hashem's glory without any concern for personal benefit, his merits would not be diminished at all.

When we call upon Hashem, מגן אברהם the Shield of Avraham, in the beginning of *Shemoneh Esrei*, we declare that although we are about to make many requests during *Shemoneh Esrei*, we too desire that our service of G-d be without any concern for personal benefit, and that our merits should not be diminished. (Adapted from *Shemoneh Esrei*, Rabbi Avrohom Chaim Feuer, *Artscroll*, Page 64)

**THEME:**

An essential concept of the prayer

*The Only Protection*

Hashem extends his protection of our forefather Avraham to us, his descendants.

**INSIGHT:**

Deeper meanings of the theme

*There for Us*

The culmination of the all-important first blessing in *Shemoneh Esrei* reminds us that Hashem is a מגן אברהם, He preserves the "spark of Avraham" in each of us. Although each Jew is free to choose between good and evil, Hashem will not allow our holy souls to perish within us (*Ohr Gedalyahu*, *Moadim*, p. 29). Furthermore, Hashem is *Avinu She'bashamayim*—a caring Father in heaven who will never forsake His children and will protect them.

This is especially important as we attempt to maintain our sense of security in a world filled with political volatility and myriad personal tragedies. These mounting troubles may slowly plant seeds of doubt in our confidence of Hashem's protection. How should we, who strive to live with *emunah*, react in troubled times?

The *Midrash Rabbah* (on *Devarim*, 2:6), in discussing the verse (*Devarim*, 3:23), "Va'eschanan el Hashem ba'eis hahee leimor—I exhorted Hashem at that

time saying," explains that the word "leimor" means, "say" to the generations that during troubled times they should pray. The Rambam (*Taanis* 1:1) states, "It is a mitzvah from the Torah to cry out to Hashem for help ... whenever trouble and persecution strike the community."

When we pray during troubled times, we confirm our belief that only Hashem can help us. Sometimes, however, a person does not refrain from praying because he lacks confidence in Hashem's power, but rather, because he lacks confidence in his own worthiness. However, as the *Sefer Ha'Ikrim* (*Maamar* 4, Chapter 16) explains, Hashem provides for us each day, not due to our righteousness, but rather due to Hashem's benevolence and compassion.

We need not be perfect, or even close to it, to beseech Hashem in prayer. We simply need to gratefully grasp the lifeline He is extending to us, confident that at the other end is the One Power who can save us.

**VISUALIZE:**

Images that bring the prayer to life

*Safe Inside*

"This all-terrain vehicle is one hundred percent stable. Its outer shell is impermeable. Even an elephant couldn't crush it. Nothing can harm you in there, so don't panic, no matter what you encounter."

With that assurance, the Stein family climbed into their vehicle and set out on a fascinating safari through the African jungle. They



encountered many dangerous animals on their journey, but they knew that as long as they stayed inside their jeep, and drove it properly, nothing could harm them. The troop of chimps that climbed on top and shook the jeep could not tip it. The lions that roamed the open plains couldn't attack them.

The snakes couldn't harm them, the mosquitoes couldn't bite them. Often, they became alarmed at the approach of a dangerous animal, but then they remembered that they were inside their jeep, and they were safe.

Life is likewise a safari through dangerous territory. We perceive much that has the potential to harm us, but we are shielded by Hashem's constant protection. While unfortunately, there are times when we may suffer, we can never be destroyed.

**Try This!**

▶ When a soldier goes forth into a dangerous situation, he leaves a comrade behind, watchfully scanning the scene for any surprise attacker. His job is to shoot down the attacker before the attacker shoots the other soldier. The second soldier is the "cover" for the first. Think about this scenario as it applies to this *berachah*: we often must go forth into situations that are frightening or confusing. Trepidation is natural. However, Hashem watches over us, ready to step in and eliminate that which threatens our progress. He's got us "covered." Keep this image in mind when saying מגן אברהם .

**Did You Know**

▶ *Reducing the Deficit*

As previously explained, the ideal is for a person to concentrate on the meaning of all of the words in *Shemoneh Esrei* (*Orach Chaim*, *Siman* 101:1). At a minimum, he should have *kavannah* during the blessings of the *Avos* (*ibid.*, *Siman* 101:1). If he realizes that he did not *kavannah* during the first *berachah* of *Shemoneh Esrei*, he has several options:

\*If he realizes that he did not have *kavannah* before he recited "Baruch Ata Hashem," at the end of the first *berachah*, he should return to "Elokai Avraham" and repeat the *berachah* (*Mishnah Berurah*, *Siman* 101:4).

\* Even if he did not have *kavannah* for the meaning of the words of the first *berachah*, he is considered to have recited a proper *Shemoneh Esrei* provided he thinks of the meaning of the words of the first *berachah* before he begins saying the next *berachah* "Ata gibor" (*Sheilos U'Teshuvos Teshuvos V'Hanhagos*, 4:28, citing from Rav Chaim Kanievsky in the name of the Chazon Ish).

See next week's "Did You Know" for additional solutions.