

Tefillah Focus Of The Week:

שמנה עשרה

Feeling the Shechinah

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

May our eyes behold Your return to Zion in compassion. Blessed are You, Hashem, Who restores His Shechinah (Presence) to Zion.

ותחזינה עינינו  
בשובך לציון  
ברחמים. ברוך  
אתה ה', המחזיר  
שכינתו לציון.

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



What are we praying for when we ask Hashem to restore His Shechinah (Presence) to Zion? For most people, the Shechinah remains an enigma. The efficacy of our prayers, therefore, depends on our willingness to look more deeply into the nature of this unseen Presence, and gain an understanding of how It manifests Itself in our world.

A fundamental question arises: If Hashem is Omnipresent, why do we single out the Shechinah's presence in certain holy places such as a shul during tefillah? What is the significance of the Shechinah's presence in these sacred places if Hashem is everywhere?

Rav Chaim Friedlander (*Sifsei Chaim, Pirkei Emunah V'Hashgachah*, Volume 1, page 170, citing the *Ramchal*) provides an explanation that "Shechinah" — from the phraseology "that which resides in your midst" — represents our relationship with Hashem. Thus, although His Presence is indeed constant, our awareness of the Shechinah is stronger when we are inspired by an occasion or a place of holiness. To the extent that we seek the Shechinah, we find It.

The Gemara (*Berachos 6a*) teaches that the Shechinah resides in places of holiness: the Holy Temple, Jerusalem, and in a shul when ten men pray together. The Shechinah is also present when three judges sit in judgment, and when even one person studies Torah.

**THEME:**

An essential concept of the prayer

*A Clear View*

We ask Hashem to make His presence, the Shechinah, clear to us as it was in the days of the First *Bais HaMikdash*.

**INSIGHT:**

Deeper meanings of the theme

*The Hidden Presence*

The Rambam (*Hilchos Bais Ha'Bechirah 6:16*) teaches, "...in the *Bais HaMikdash* and Jerusalem, the original holiness remains forever...because...of the Shechinah which never ceases." Yet, we pray in *Shemoneh Esrei* for the return of the Shechinah with the words, המחזיר שכינתו לציון—(Hashem) Who restores His Shechinah (Presence) to Zion. Based on the Rambam's teaching, this prayer would seem to be superfluous.

the absolute awareness of the Shechinah felt in the First *Bais HaMikdash* was replaced by a lesser manifestation in the Second. We pray daily for Hashem to restore the Shechinah to Its previous peak of glory with the coming of *Mashiach*.

*Aruch L'Ner (She'eilos U'Teshuvos Binyan Tzion, Siman 3)* resolves this difficulty by explaining that the Second *Bais HaMikdash* lacked five aspects that were present in the First *Bais HaMikdash (Yoma 21b)*, and one of these was the Shechinah. However, this was not a total absence; rather,

In our times, the Shechinah is even less apparent; as the Gemara (*Megillah 29a*) states, the Shechinah is in exile with the Jewish nation. These are times of *hester panim*, meaning that Hashem's face is hidden from the world stage. Under this circumstance, recognizing Hashem's overseeing of our daily lives becomes a far greater challenge. Our difficulty in connecting with the Shechinah, even as we stand in a holy place speaking words of prayer, is one more painful aspect of our long and bitter exile.

**VISUALIZE:**

Images that bring the prayer to life

*Standing in a Holy Place*

Think of the holiest people you have ever encountered. *Rabbonim, Gedolim, Rebbeim*, even simple people who live a pure, elevated life. Imagine the feeling of walking into a room populated by all these people. The air is charged with *kedushah*. Just by being in that room, you feel that



you have been transported to a different reality. You need not make a leap of faith that Hashem is present, because His presence and power are almost palpable. When you say *Shemoneh Esrei* with this

group, you feel certain that your prayers are riding on the wings of theirs, heading straight to the *Kisei Hakovod*.

This is the power of having a clear, unambiguous awareness of the Shechinah. It is for this brilliant clarity and reassuring certainty that we pray when we ask Hashem to restore His Shechinah to our world.

**Try This!**

► The *Ohr HaChaim Hakadosh (Bereishis 46:4)* comments that the levels of *kedushah* emanating from the Shechinah are many, i.e. where ten men study Torah together, and to a lesser degree, where two, or even one, learn. Just as the strength of the sun's rays varies from place to place, the force of the sacred "rays" of the Shechinah also varies according to the particular holy place or occurrence.

But we can only absorb the warmth and light of these rays if we expose ourselves to them by uncovering our hearts and minds. Our task as we pray is to expose our souls to the "rays" of the Shechinah — to shed the layers of distraction and habituation — and feel Its radiant Presence all around us. Next time you pray for the Shechinah's presence, imagine the warm glow of the sun illuminating you as you stand and pray.

**Did You Know**

► *The Ultimate Goal*

Ideally, there should be no talking in *shul* from the beginning to the end of *prayer*. This should be the long-range goal of every congregation. Idle talk, which even includes conversation about one's livelihood or other essential needs (*Mishnah Berurah 151:2*) is forbidden in *shul* even when prayers are not being recited (*Siman 151:1*).

Nowadays, there is some room for leniency concerning such talk when prayers are not being recited, since some *Rishonim* rule that *shuls* are generally built with a precondition allowing them to be used for essential matters other than prayer (*Aruch HaShulchan, Siman 151:5*. Concerning *shuls* in Eretz Yisrael, see *Siman 151:11; Mishnah Berurah, Ibid:38* and *Beur Halachah, Ibid, s.v. 'Aval B'batei Kneisius'*).