

Partners in Prayer

The Nine Days - Tisha B'av Siddur

Machberet Avodas Hashem



Partners
In Prayer

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The Rambam says at the beginning of the laws of fasts, Hilchot Taanit chapter one, that it is a positive Torah commandment to cry out and to sound trumpets in the event of any difficulty that arises which affects the community. Of course, sounding the trumpet means to call people's attention, to warn them, to stir them, and awaken them.

It's interesting that we use the same trumpets during times of great joy. But how do we know that there is such a Torah commandment to do it at a time of trouble? The verse says in Bamidbar (10:9), "When you go out to war against an enemy who attacks you, and you sound the trumpets." This commandment, explains the Rambam, is not restricted to a limited scope. Rather, the intent is whenever you are distressed by difficulties, for example famine, plague, locusts, or the like, cry out to God because of them and sound the trumpets.

The Rambam continues in the second Halacha explaining that this practice is considered a path of repentance for when a difficulty arises, so that people cry out to God and sound the trumpets. Everyone will realize that the difficulty occurred as a consequence of their conduct. As Jeremiah taught in chapter five of Jeremiah verse 25, "your sins have caused the rains and the harvest to turn away"; the realization that some of what is happening is a direct consequence of our own misbehavior or mistakes will, in itself, cause the removal of the difficult.

Conversely, he continues in Halacha three, should the people fail to cry out and sound the trumpets and instead choose to say what has happened to us is merely a natural phenomena; this difficulty is merely a chance occurrence, then this is a cruel conception of things which causes the difficulty to remain. When the people remain attached to their wicked deeds, thus this time of distress will lead to further distress.

This is implied by the Torah statement, Vayikra chapter 26 verses 27 and 28, "If you remain indifferent to capital me, God, I will be indifferent to you with a vengeance." The implication of this verse is when I bring difficulties upon you, so that you shall repent and you see it as a chance occurrence, I will add to your punishment, an expression of vengeance for that indifference to divine providence.

We all took the crisis, the COVID virus, seriously. We examine our ways, and many of us accepted upon ourselves to respond by examining the way we pray, the way we interact with other people, our behavior in general. We've committed ourselves to see what we could do to change. However, once it is over, we cannot forget the Divine Providence. When we see the light at the end of the tunnel, we cannot ignore that there was a message. The message was not only for the moment, but it was a message of Divine Providence calling on us to change and to do teshuva. Therefore, when we see the light at the end of the tunnel, when we are ready to step into the future, we must pause and reflect on what we have learned and figure out how to apply those lessons in a constructive and positive way.

This has been the mission of partners in prayer. We are committed to helping people learn how to take all life experiences and derive lessons and insights from them, and incorporate those experiences and lessons into our regular service of God. No matter the circumstances, we can be involved in a constant process of growth, otherwise known as *halicha*, to move on, to grow. The almighty promised Avraham Avinu in that first statement of *Lech Lecha* that when you

go forward and you commit yourself to a life of movement and growth, you will find that it is to your benefit, to your pleasure, and to your success.

We designed the COVID survivors Tisha B'av prayers with this in mind. We hope to take all the lessons that people have learned and apply them to our prayers and the way we observe different laws. Obviously, we can offer only those insights shared by contributors to Partners in Prayer. And it is this gift that we present to you.

The Nine Days Siddur

A few months before my Father, *zichron tzadik le'vracha*, passed away, it was clear that he was approaching the end of his life. There was a part of me that rejected the possibility. Even as I cringed, I had to understand how much of a reality it was becoming. When his final diagnosis was given, and it was clear that he would not survive a long time, I could no longer deny it. Everything in my life began to change: who I am as a Jew and as a human being; so much of how I study Hashem's Torah, so much of how I observe Hashem's mitzvos. So much of how I respond to everything that happens in my life and the world around me was shaped and continues to be shaped by the teachings and guidance of my father. And I began to face a reality of a world without him.

Then, of course, he passed away, and my world was shattered. I had to learn how to recreate or create a new life using all that he had taught me, but without his actual physical presence. I could no longer pick up the phone multiple times each day to ask a question, to share an idea, to ask for an opinion about a choice, a decision, or the way I would choose to read a verse in Hashem's Torah.

There were stages, three stages: 1) The initial reaction, which was a longer period; 2) the immediate sense of his impending death, more direct; 3) and then his actual passing. Each one of those stages was expressed in an entirely different way in my service of God. In that first stage my service became clearer. I wanted to focus. I wanted to do it better. I wanted to do it in his merit. The next stage, I began to seek, mourn over what I was losing and seek a path for the future. In the final stage, after he had passed away, I decided how to pray, how to live, how to have a relationship with the Almighty without that primal voice that had guided me my entire life.

Those three stages parallel the three weeks: 1) after the walls of Jerusalem were breached; 2) the nine days, the beginning of the month of Av; 3) and then the actual day of death, the destruction of the temple, the ninth of Av. We can pray differently during each of those stages. We can approach God differently. In fact, not only can we, we must, we should, as an expression of paying attention to all that happens around us, so that we do not pray on one day the way that we prayed a day earlier, but that we continuously grow, develop, and bring our prayers and our intentions to life with a sense of vibrancy, or even desperation in certain moments, but connected to life as we are living.

It's interesting to me to look back on the COVID crisis and realize that there were stages. There were those opening warnings of what was happening in China and other countries and how scary it would be when it would happen here. Then it intensified and the streets were closed. The stores were closed. We were told to stay in our homes, and we couldn't go out. We couldn't go shopping. The economy was shut down. It was terrifying. And then of course, there was that time of intense tragedy, when there were images of refrigerated trucks loaded with bodies, of funeral homes with bodies lined up on the ground, when there were videos of people being buried alone, without any family members, people sitting Shiva, mourning the death of a parent alone. Young children without their parents, young men and young women losing a spouse to this invisible, but potent enemy. We experienced the same types of stages. We, partners in prayer, have committed ourselves to compose a siddur that will not only take the themes and the

lessons that we have derived from our recent potent experiences and apply them, but we will apply them in an immediate sense to the siddur, to the prayer book.

Partners in Prayer incorporated certain things in our prayers during the three weeks that begin with 1) the 17th of Tamuz, the breaching of the walls of Jerusalem, 2) the nine days the month of August, when the quarantine shuts down everything and the tragedy is real, and then 3) the ultimate point of the crisis for those who had relatives who passed away, for those who had relatives who were devastatingly ill, and for those touched by the suffering. Our hearts reverberate to the pain of so many other people, in a world of a reality in which we were in a way disconnected, but found a way to connect otherwise. We can connect those feelings, those experiences to God and say, "we know how to use these feelings because you have already granted us the tools by giving us this time of year broken into stages: the three weeks; the month of Av, and Tisha B'Av itself." We are using God's kingdom; we are using the words of our prayer to reify all we have learned to use it in a constructive way to say to God, "we are acknowledging your divine providence. We're here using it to grow and improve and become closer with You." In this way, all that Hashem imposed on us was turned ultimately into good.

The Nine Days Insights

Learning To Count

Enough already! The second generation from the Exodus was ready to enter Canaan, and they were still questioning, rebelling, and sinning! Moses knew that his role was nearing its end, and the people were as volatile as the slaves he had led out of Egypt. The people sinned with the daughters of Moab. A huge plague killed 24,000. The nation would have to go to war against Midian who had conspired against them. Moses' war department began counting the people, reassuring them of God's continued love for them, and to determine the system through which the land of Canaan would be divided between the tribes. Moses is concerned. Moses is exhausted. Moses is very busy.

While Moses is dealing with these important issues, five sisters feel that the law of inheritance is not fair. The man who is considering the future of the Jewish people, planning a war, attempting to have the incorrigible people reconnect with God after their sins, is interrupted by the sisters demanding a hearing. They were frustrated by the rulings of all the wonderful, well-meaning rabbis of the lower courts, so they insisted on speaking directly to Moses. How beautiful is this scene of women who feel displaced immediately received by the incredibly busy and great leader, who surely had more epochal issues on his mind! What a statement Moses made by just listening to their complaint!

All war preparations pause. Moses' generals stand aside to allow the judges to sit with Moses. The women present their case, and Moses, on whom all rely for truth, guidance, and war plans, openly admits that he doesn't know how to address their concerns; he will have to use his hotline to God to get the answer. Moses can openly admit that he doesn't know the answer. I am moved to my core when Moses declares that he must use the hotline, usually reserved for crises and important revelations, to involve God in this situation. Five women who feel displaced by the law are sufficiently important to pause all war preparations and plans for the nation's future to seek God for an answer.

Moses could not count the people if a single person felt displaced. The people would be numbers, not human beings. If Moses can display how the entire nation must pause and reach for the hotline because a few individuals feel that the law is unfair, he will finally be able to prepare the nation to build the Land of Israel. He will be able to calmly observe a new leader assume his role because it will be a nation that will never allow a single person to feel arbitrarily dismissed. Each person will "count," because each person will understand her significance to the nation and to God.

It is at this moment that Moses involves himself in the selection of the new leader. He demands a leader who will pay attention to the displaced people. He insists on a leader who will go out and find the displaced. The leader who will "bring them in," seeking out every man and woman so that none are lost between the cracks, is the one who assumes the role of Moses. The court that will pause its war preparations and important conferences discussing the future of the nation for the sake of one lost soul is the court of Moses.

The leader who focuses on the "significant" issues facing the people, who does not have the time or inclination to "go out before them and come in before them," to seek out the lost and displaced, does not lead as a Moses. The teacher who does not declare that a single child is worth pausing an important lesson, does not teach in the Moses method. The Jewish court that says to a suffering woman, "We summoned your husband but he refused to come, so there is nothing we can do to help you," is not a court of Moses. A Jewish court that can arbitrarily declare the law, and allow someone who came for help to feel brushed aside by the law, is not a court of Moses. Rabbis who do not pause in their battle against the internet to seek out every

woman who feels displaced by the law, to reach out to every soul disappearing from the community, are not the rabbis sought by Moses.

We are taught that the Second Temple was destroyed because of hatred between people. A nation guided by a court of Moses and led by the leader who will shake the highest heavens because five women feel displaced will develop such honor, respect, and love for each other that the hatred will disappear; all will feel that they count.

We are now approaching the anniversary of the Temple's destruction. We can battle the hatred by insisting that each voice be heard, that each soul's needs be addressed by the hotline, by demanding that our leaders make it absolutely clear that a woman who feels displaced is important enough to pause all war plans and steering committees. Everyone has their own opinion on the COVID crisis and the protocol regarding it. Hashem has given us a test to see if we can listen and respect those with different views. The way that we respond to others is not merely just an interaction, but part of our avodas Hashem. We'll have our hotline when we, as a nation, appreciate that every soul "counts."

The Price of Relationships

By Rabbi Simcha Weinberg in Holidays, Relationships

They have been married for so long that they don't remember why they are fighting. They simply know that they are in an argument. There is no single specific issue.

They fight. They stopped listening to each other many years ago. The only thing they do hear is criticism. There is no "reason" for them to argue other than their being so accustomed to fighting. That, I believe, is the definition of Sin'at Chinam, or hatred for no reason. They are stuck in their argument and, when asked, admit that they cannot picture how to live with each other without arguing.

I spend a great deal of time working with people, many of whom are sinking in a quagmire of resentment and anger. People carry their anger for years, even after they have forgotten what provoked their anger. The hatred takes on a life of its own. That is Sin'at Chinam. It is even more frustrating to observe people seeding such long-lasting resentments. One person phrases something in a poor manner, the other person is hurt, the first person is shocked that he provoked such a response and becomes so angry that he will say something hurtful, and the conflict takes root. Neither one will recall exactly how the argument began, but it doesn't matter; it takes on a life of its own. That is Sin'at Chinam.

I have often heard Rav Kook, Zt"l, quoted as saying, "The only way to repair Sin'at Chinam is Ahavat Chinam." It seems that Rav Kook was focusing on the Sin'a, the hatred. I suggest that we focus instead on the Chinam, or 'Free.'

People have difficulty acknowledging that they pay a price for an argument. We pay a steep price even when we are 100% in the right. There is no Chinam argument without a price, just as there is no Ahavah, or love without a price.

Love is not only experienced; it makes demands. Love demands patience, generosity, selflessness, understanding, empathy, and much more. We make our first mistake when we think that either love or hate is Chinam – free, meaning that we do not pay a price.

When one person hears an insult, he has a choice whether he is willing to 'pay,' meaning to invest effort in understanding what the other said or meant, or what the other was feeling that led him to voice the insult.

When we are willing to 'pay' we will be able to find a solution. However, if we focus on 'Chinam,' our desire to have love without having to pay, we will certainly be unwilling to 'pay' to repair a situation of Sin'a, hatred.

Honoring Intentions

By Machberes Avodas Hashem

The Vishnitzer Rebbe rebuked the Mitnagdim who constantly criticized the Lubliner. He said, "You are like the farmer to whom a machinist presented an agricultural machine. Not understanding how it works, the farmer had it thrown out. Not knowing the source of the Holy Rabbi's wondrous acts, you wish to remove him from your midst."

The Lubliner heard of this and said to the Vishnitzer, "Your interest pleases me, but your rebuke displeases me. They quarrel with me for the sake of the Lord. Therefore, why rebuke them?" (Niflaot haRebbe, page 118)

It is essential during the period of the Three Weeks that we honor the intention of those with whom we disagree. Although we may disagree with their actions, we must always honor their intentions.

Consider people with whom you disagree. Question whether your issue is with their actions or their intentions. Are you certain that their intentions are not for the sake of God? Simply asking ourselves this question is an important step in repairing the hatred that led to the destruction of the Second Temple.

Preparation For Tefillah

Finding the Place To Pray

By: Machberes Avodas Hashem

"Know that God has set apart to Himself the devoted one; God will hear when I call to Him (Psalms 4:4)."

The Holy One, Blessed is He, said to Israel: "I have said to you, when you pray, pray in the synagogue in your city. If you cannot pray in the synagogue, pray in your field. If you cannot pray in your field, pray in your house. And if you cannot pray in your house, pray on your bed. And if you cannot pray on your bed, reflect in your heart (Midrash Tehillim 4:9)."

During the Three Weeks we are reminded that we no longer have a Temple in which to pray. So, we turned to the synagogue to pray. However, our long exile has reminded us that we do not always have a synagogue in which to pray, so we turn to pray in the field. For most of the diaspora we were not safe even in the field, so we turned to our homes in which to pray. Even our homes were not safe, even our beds.

"Reflect in your heart," for that is the one place where we can always pray in safety. "May the expressions of my mouth and the thoughts of my heart find favor before You, God, my Rock and my Redeemer (Psalms 108:7)." Rav Kook explains that there are times when we cannot even find "the expressions of my mouth," and must rely on, "the thoughts of my heart." (Olat Ra'ayah)

The COVID crisis has lent us the true understanding and pain of not being allowed to pray in a shul or with a minyan. We can relate to the pain of losing the Beit Hamikdash, because we lost the atmosphere of davening together. The Three Weeks is a time when we must focus on, "Reflect in your heart," and, "the thoughts of my heart." It is the time when we must recall that no matter how unsafe we may be, or how distant we are from the most powerful place of prayer, the Beit Hamikdash, we can always speak to God simply by reflecting in our hearts.

Morning Prayers

Modeh Ani

The kavanah for a woman for Modeh Ani during the three weeks is thank you for guiding me, giving direction when all seems to be growing dark. This is based on Halacha and a verse in Proverbs. The Halacha is quoted in the Chai Adam, and he explains that when one recites Modeh Ani they should have in mind a verse from Mishlei, Proverbs chapter six verse 22, “as you go forth, it will guide you as you recline, it will guard you and when you awake, it will converse with you”. This verse is a declaration that God is guiding me, that God is guarding me, and that I am able to live my life in the form of a conversation with God. Through using God's Torah, God's mitzvos, and prayer, we can engage in a constant conversation with God.

During a time when the world is dark, when the world is frightening, when the world is closing in, we open our eyes with an expression of hope. If I may be locked into my home, at least I can still continue to have this regular conversation with God throughout the entire day. What's interesting is that this is a verse that we also use at the end of completing a tractate of the Talmud, a siyum. We're celebrating the fact that one conversation ends, meaning my conversation with this book, the tractate that I've just completed, but I will now continue the conversation, either with a different book, or by reviewing what's happening within this book. This means that every single day when I say Modeh Ani, I can say, “I've had a conversation with you yesterday, and you guarded me and kept me alive until today. Now I want to continue my life as a conversation with you, and nothing can stop it.” Nothing can break this connection.

It's also important to know that this is the first thing we do in the morning in a world in which our physical efforts are quite restricted, meaning we're focused on protecting ourselves rather than going out into the world and doing. It is of utmost importance to remember this important Judaic teaching, which is to declare that today will be a prayer day. We described that today will be a prayer day by saying, “I intend to use this day as a conversation with you.”

There is a teaching in a sefer called the Ohr Yesha at the beginning of the portion of Bereishes. Rashi explains the word Bereishes as *reshviel reishes*, for the sake of the first. What's the first? Rashi offers a number of things, and one of them is a verse in Bamidbar, Chapter 15 verse 20, “as the first of your kneading you shall set aside a loaf as a portion”, *reishes arisoseichem challah*, you can offer challah. He quotes his rebbi, the Radziner rebbi, as saying that *arisoseichem* can also mean your bed. Reishis, the first thing when you rise up from your bed, *challah she'b'challa*. This challah is prayer because when God said to Moshe, “Moshe, I have to wipe out the Jews because they made themselves a golden calf.”, “*Vayichal Moshe*”, Moshe began to pray. *Vayichal* sounds like challah.

In a moment of crisis, with God actually saying, “I will wipe them out.” They've destroyed everything, yet it is still possible to pray. The walls of Jerusalem have been breached. The first thing, *arisoseichem*, when you get up from your beds, and you're waking up to a different world, challah, say the same kind of prayer as did Moses in response to the first news he received about the golden calf.

Reishis arisoseichem, that first morning when we woke up in a different world because things were changing. We were being told all sorts of things about an invisible virus, and we didn't know how dangerous it was, how many people would get sick, and how many people

would die. Our response was chalah, to respond as did Moshe, to daven. We can celebrate the fact that in this darkest of times we turned to God in prayer, and just as the prayer of Moses was affected after the sin of the golden calf, our prayers can be effective now during the three weeks, even as the walls of Jerusalem had been breached. We know that our prayers changed, praying at home, praying in a more focused way, praying differently, praying better, praying with more awareness that our tefillos are effective. And now our lives can move on.

Modeh Ani

By Rabbi Simcha Weinberg

"So the king gave the order, and they brought Daniel and threw him into the lions' den. The king said to Daniel, 'May your Lord, Whom you serve continually, rescue you!' A stone was brought and placed over the mouth of the den, and the king sealed it with his own signet ring and with the rings of his nobles, so that Daniel's situation might not be changed.

Then the king returned to his palace and spent the night without eating and without any entertainment being brought to him. And he could not sleep. At the first light of dawn, the king got up and hurried to the lions' den. When he came near the den, he called to Daniel in an anguished voice, 'Daniel, servant of the living God, has your Lord, whom you serve continually, been able to rescue you from the lions?'

Daniel answered, 'Oh king, live forever! My Lord sent his angel, and he shut the mouths of the lions. They have not hurt me, because I was found innocent in His sight. Nor have I ever done any wrong before you, oh king.' The king was overjoyed and gave orders to lift Daniel out of the den. And when Daniel was lifted from the den, no wound was found on him, because he had trusted in his God (Daniel 6:16-23)."

What did Daniel experience when he realized that he was safe? How did Darius respond to the fact that Daniel was still alive? We can use this blessing to rejoice in the fact that we are alive for another day, ready to continue to fight for life and redemption.

Washing Negel Vasser

The next thing that comes up in the siddur is that we wash our hands. Interestingly, when the Talmud discusses washing our hands there is a very strange quote in Shabbat 108 b. The Gemarah says, a hand that touches the eye should be severed because it harms the eye. A hand that touches the nose should be severed; it's dangerous. A hand that touches the mouth should be severed; it's dangerous, spreads germs, poisons, who knows what. A hand that touches the ear should be severed, and that touches one's wound should be severed. The Gemara continues with information about all the dangers that occur to people who are not careful with what they do with their hands. For this reason we wake up and immediately wash our hands as a statement that we are going to be careful.

When we recite the actual blessing, *al netilat yadaim*, we are acknowledging the kavanah that mitzvot nurture life. This is based on a Shela Hakodesh, standing for the Shnei Luchot Habrit, who comments on a teaching of the Talmud in Brachot 60 B, which is that one should recite the blessing for washing one's hands, but in the talmud, the blessing over washing one's hands is the final blessing, not the first. Why do we recite this as the first blessing? The Shela bases the response on Rabbeinu Asher, a rishon - a very early Talmudic commentator and halacha decisor who had to run away from Worms and go to Spain. He said that obviously I can't recite the blessing before I wash my hands because my hands are not yet clean. Once I recite the blessing, it transforms everything I can do afterwards. I am celebrating the fact that I wash my hands, and it is now that I can actually recite a blessing because I have washed my hands.

There are times when we're in a situation, such as our recent circumstances, when we wonder how much can we do? We're stuck at home. We can learn, we can study, we can pray, we can teach, we can do acts of kindness, call people. But it's difficult to realize that what we do matters in the spiritual world as well. The blessing of *al netilat yadaim* means that you can now recite a blessing that you could not recite before you washed your hands. You can actually make a difference through paying attention to your hands. You can take this terrible crisis about where you put your hand and turn it into a time of blessing.

During the three weeks the walls of Jerusalem were breached. There was violence. There was smoke, and it was all arrows and fire. I'm sure people were not clean. And yet imagine there are soldiers barging into the city, and you're hiding, and the time comes to pray, and you find some way to clean your hands, and then you can recite a blessing. You can say, despite this horrible, dark, frightening, intimidating time, I know that what I do has elevated me to a place where I was not before. Before I wash my hands I cannot recite a blessing, and now I can.

Netilat Yadaim

By Rabbi Simcha Weinberg

"I will betroth you to Me forever; I will betroth you in righteousness and justice, in love and compassion. I will betroth you in faithfulness, and you will acknowledge God (Hosea 2:19-20)."

The Abudirham associates the verses above with this blessing: we celebrate the unbreakable bond between God and Israel that is compared to the relationship between a husband and wife. We raise our hands as if to show that we still carry the betrothal ring given to us at Sinai.

Asher Yatzar

The next blessing is the one we recite after going to the bathroom, known as Asher Yatzar. The basic kavanah is, "I honor the body that was designed to protect itself." This is based on a halacha quoted in the Tur Shulchan Aruch, the son of Rabbeinu Asher, the Rosh. The Tur wonders that if we go to the bathroom and we have a bowel movement, then perhaps it's not sufficient to just say the blessing of Asher Yatzar because if I had to clean myself, I also have to wash my hands, so perhaps I should also recite a blessing *al netilat yadaim*. Of course we don't do this, but there is an appreciation of living, that to do anything in which we pay attention to protecting our bodies is, number one a mitzvah, and number two a way of honoring the body given to us by God, a way of honoring a body designed to protect itself from disease and from poisons. The act itself is a way of honoring our Creator, and this we could do with enhanced awareness.

Once we started learning about the COVID virus and the dangers of touching our face, of touching surfaces that have been touched by strangers, and the need to sterilize, all celebration of Asher Yatzar is in the way of honoring, even in dark times, the gifts that we continue to possess, despite whatever is going on.

Asher Yatzar

By Rabbi Simcha Weinberg

"By wisdom God laid the earth's foundations, by understanding He set the heavens in place; by His knowledge the deeps were divided, and the clouds let drop the dew (Proverbs 3:19-20)."

The wisdom of, "Who fashioned man with wisdom," is the same wisdom with which God laid the foundations of the earth. We need only look to the functioning of our bodies to experience this wisdom and know that we can rely on that wisdom to protect us.

"It is obvious and known before Your Throne of Glory." Why do we speak of our bodily functioning as being before God's Throne of Glory?

"When the Ark of God had been in Philistine territory seven months, the Philistines called for the priests and the diviners and said, 'What shall we do with the Ark of God? Tell us how we should send it back to its place.'

They answered, 'If you return the Ark of the Lord of Israel, do not send it away empty, but by all means send a guilt offering to him. Then you will be healed, and you will know why his hand has not been lifted from you.'

The Philistines asked, 'What guilt offering should we send to Him?' They replied, 'Five gold hemorrhoids and five gold rats, according to the number of the Philistine rulers, because the same plague has struck both you and your rulers. Make models of the hemorrhoids and of the rats that are destroying the country, and pay honor to Israel's Lord. Perhaps He will lift His hand from you and your gods and your land.'

Why do you harden your hearts as the Egyptians and Pharaoh did? When he treated them harshly, did they not send the Israelites out so they could go on their way?" Now then, get a new cart ready, with two cows that have calved and have never been yoked. Hitch the cows to the cart, but take their calves away and pen them up.

Take the Ark of God and put it on the cart, and in a chest beside it put the gold objects you are sending back to him as a guilt offering. Send it on its way, but keep watching it. If it goes up to its own territory, toward Beth Shemesh, then God has brought this great disaster on us. But if it does not, then we will know that it was not his hand that struck us and that it happened to us by chance.' So they did this. They took two such cows and hitched them to the cart, and penned up their calves.

They placed the Ark of God on the cart and along with it the chest containing the gold rats and the models of the hemorrhoids. Then the cows went straight up toward Beth Shemesh, keeping on the road and lowing all the way; they did not turn to the right or to the left. The rulers of the Philistines followed them as far as the border of Beth Shemesh.

Now the people of Beth Shemesh were harvesting their wheat in the valley, and when they looked up and saw the ark, they rejoiced at the sight. The cart came to the field of Joshua of Beth Shemesh, and there it stopped beside a large rock. The people chopped up the wood of the cart and sacrificed the cows as a burnt offering to God.

The Levites took down the Ark of God, together with the chest containing the gold objects, and placed them on the large rock. On that day the people of Beth Shemesh offered burnt offerings and made sacrifices to God.

The five rulers of the Philistines saw all this, and then returned that same day to Ekron. These are the gold hemorrhoids the Philistines sent as a guilt offering to God - one each for Ashdod, Gaza, Ashkelon, Gath and Ekron. And the number of the gold rats was according to the number of Philistine towns belonging to the five rulers - the fortified towns with their country villages (I Samuel 6:1-18)." The hemorrhoids the Philistines sent were eventually placed in the Holy of Holies!

Even when we, Israel, are in our lowest state, we still stand before God's Throne of Glory. My Lord, the soul You placed within me: "I cannot think that we are useless or God would not have created us (Geronimo, Apache Leader)."

The complexity of our Higher Souls and the process of creation, formation, and making are powerful indications of our significance. Even in the darkest moments of exile, we have derived our meaning from God and not from the way we are treated by others.

Elokai Netzor

The next blessing is Elokai, “My Lord, the one who empowers me, the soul you have placed in me.” The basic question about this blessing is why it does not begin with *baruch ata Hashem*, the way most blessings do. There are a number of answers, but during this recent crisis, COVID, during the three weeks, there's a kavanah that I use which is, “thank you for the ability to live life beyond the physical, for giving me the means to live a life that is not limited to my physical existence.” This is based on a teaching of Tosfos in which they say that the reason this blessing does not begin with *baruch ata Hashem* is because it is a birchat Hoda'ah, a thank you blessing, and therefore it's not necessary to begin with *baruch ata Hashem*.

When I had to deal with the thought that the death of my father was approaching me, the walls were breached, the idea that only my physical world was going to change, but that the spiritual life that he had nurtured in me and given to me would continue to sustain me, really helped me focus during that time. And I suspect that it did for those who were in Jerusalem immediately after the breaching of the walls.

Blessings for Torah Learning

Now, of course, we go to the blessings over Torah learning. During the beginning of the crisis of COVID and during the three weeks, the basic kavanah that I had about this blessing is not about the Torah that has been given to me. I don't begin with that intention. I begin with a quest, Torah as my quest, which is based on a teaching of the Talmud in Sanhedrin 97 A. The gemara explains that the 2000 years of Torah began with Abraham beginning his quest to find God. We are in a situation in which we're seeking answers, in which we're seeking to understand. What do we have to change? Are we doing anything wrong? In what way do we have to improve? How can I best guide my children through this crisis? How can I grow from it? That is a quest, and that quest is always guided by Torah, just as it was even after the walls of Jerusalem were breached because they still had Torah, and they still looked to Torah to guide them.

Blessings for Torah Learning: Torah Study

By: Machberes Avodas Hashem

The Dubner Maggid taught: A storekeeper had two friends. One showed his friendship by giving his patronage to his friend. The other displayed his friendship by advertising the storekeeper's goods and there by inducing others to make purchases, though he himself had little need of any merchandise. Which friend did more?

"From this we learn that one man learns Torah himself out of the love of learning. The other person learns little himself but works hard to ensure that institutions of learning exist. Who does more for the Torah, which both men love?"

We are taught by the prophet Ezekiel that one of the most damaging consequences of the exile is the desecration of God's Holy Name. It is appropriate during the Three Weeks to work assiduously to sanctify His Name, especially through Torah. Some of us may study the Torah, while others do even more by going out of their way to support institutions of learning.

As men were able to return to shul a few weeks ago, you could see a little bit of the love for Torah that Klal Yisroel has by witnessing their joy for krias haTorah. Now we must strengthen that love for Torah to create Kiddush Hashem. Spend extra time during the Three Weeks studying Torah, and doing all that is possible, whether through financial contributions or other forms of volunteer work to support institutions of learning.

To Toil in Torah

By Rabbi Simcha Weinberg

"An ant on the move does more than a dozing ox (Lao-Tzu)." "When you're at the end of your rope, all you have to do is make one foot move out in front of the other. Just take the next step. That's all there is to it (Samuel Fuller)."

Our toil in Torah allows us to constantly be "on the move," never stagnating, always growing and responding to life's challenges. "Who selected us from all the peoples and gave us His Torah."

Young Reuben Land, on the point of death after a shootout in his front yard, finds himself in a heavenly country where he has a surprising encounter:

"And now the orchard ended, and a plain reached far ahead to a range of blanched mountains. A stream coursed through this plain, of different personality and purpose than the earlier wide river. A narrow, raucous stream, it flowed upward against the gradient, and mighty fish arched and swam in it, flinging manes of spray. I meant to jump in, where ever this river went, I wanted to go, and would've done so had not another figure appeared, running beside the water.

A man in pants. Flapping colorless pants and a shirt, dismal things most strange in this place. He was running upslope by the boisterous stream. Despite the clothes his face was incandescent, and when he saw me he wheeled his arms and came on ever faster. Then history entered me; my own and all the rest of it, more than I could hold, history like a heavy rain, so I knew the man coming along was my father, Jeremiah Land; and all that had happened, came back like a mournful story told from ancient days.

He was beside me in moments, stretching out his hands. What cable strength! I remember wondering what those arms were made for, no mere reward, they had design in them. Dad was laughing meantime at my arms, which were similarly strong! We were like two friends, and I saw he was proud of me, that he knew me better than he ever thought to and was not dismayed by the knowledge; and even as I wondered at his ageless face, so clear and at home (Leif Enger; "Peace Like a River")."

Each time we study Torah, we have an opportunity to reconnect to our Father, run into His arms, and experience His joy over reconnecting with us, and is probably over our strength manifested by our continued commitment to studying His Torah.

Birchat Hashachar

By Rabbi Simcha Weinberg

My intention is for this commentary to be an expression of our prayers in exile, specifically, our ability to find moments of transcendence even in the darkness of exile. As stated in the commentary to the fifth paragraph of the Hallel for Rosh Chodesh Av, our job in exile is to become Spark Collectors.

An understanding heart to distinguish between day and night:

"If you see ten troubles coming down the road, you can be sure then nine will run into the ditch before they reach you (Calvin Coolidge)."

We thank You for giving us the understanding to distinguish between the troubles that will run into the ditch and those that will reach us.

For not having made me a Gentile:

"The happiest people seem to be those who have no particular reason for being happy except that they are so (W. R. Inge)."

Many Holocaust survivors have told me that the key to maintaining their dignity even in a concentration camp was to look at their tormentors and bless God for not having made them such a low human being. They found joy in their essence.

For not having made me a slave:

"And when I rest in glory bright, The burden of my labor past, In hymns 1'11 praise Thee more and more While the eternal ages last (Synesius)."

No matter how dark life may seem, no matter how hopeless, as long as I can focus on the future with hope, I am not a slave.

For not having made me a woman:

"And the man assigned names to all the cattle and to the birds of the sky and to every beast of the field; but as for man, he did not find a helper corresponding to him. So God, the Lord, cast a deep sleep upon the man and he slept: and He took one of his sides and He filled in flesh in its place. Then God, the Lord, fashioned the side that He had taken from the man into a woman, and He brought her to the man. And the man said, "This time it is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh. This shall be called Woman, for from man was she taken (Genesis 2:20-23)."

Although God made it clear to the man that he lacked a "helper corresponding to him," when Adam first saw the woman, rather than see her as God intended, Adam saw her only as an extension of himself; "bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh." Adam had an opportunity to see someone beyond himself, someone who would push him to grow and motivate him to achieve. The name "Woman," refers to the first woman who was perceived not as herself, but only as an extension of someone else.

We thank God for, "not having made me a woman," meaning someone who is perceived by others only as an extension of them rather than as a fully independent and passionate human

being. We thank you God for giving us constant opportunities to develop our own sense of identity, and never only as defined by those who have power over us.

Who gives sight to the blind:

"For us, - whatever's undergone, Thou knowest, wiliest what is done, grief may be joy misunderstood; Only the Good discerns the good. I trust Thee while my days go on. (Elizabeth Barrett Browning)"

The darkness of exile is often compared to blindness. However, we continue to rely on God, "Who knows, Who Wills what is done," Who, "discerns the good." We thank God for the gift of Bitachon, trusting in, and relying on His vision.

Who clothes the naked:

"Certainly those determining acts of her life were not ideally beautiful. They were the mixed result of a young and noble impulse struggling amidst the conditions of an imperfect social state, in which great feelings will often take the aspect of error, and great faith the aspect of illusion. For there is no creature whose inward being is so strong that it is not greatly determined by what lies outside it."

"But we insignificant people with our daily words and acts are preparing the lives of many Dorotheas."

"Her finely-touched spirit had still its fine issues, though they were not widely visible. Her full nature like that river of which Cyrus broke the strength, spent itself in channels which had no great name on the earth. But the effect of her being on those around her was incalculably diffusive: for the growing good of the world is partly dependent on unhistoric acts; and that things are not so ill with you and me as they might have been, is half owing to the number who lived faithfully a hidden life, and rest in unvisited tombs (George Eliot; from the epilogue to Middlemarch)"

We thank God for the Mitzvot that allow and empower us to have a diffusive effect of goodness on the world. We acknowledge that our souls are dressed in many unhistoric acts that may remain hidden to the world, but are our garments before God.

Who releases the bound:

It is over. What is over? Nay, how much is over truly! - Harvest days we toiled to sow for; Now the sheaves are gathered newly, Now the wheat is garnered duly. It is finished. What is finished?

Much is finished known or unknown: Lives are finished; time diminished; Was the fallow field left unsown? Will these buds be always unblown? It suffices. What suffices? All suffices reckoned rightly:

Spring shall bloom where now the ice is,
Roses make the bramble sightly,
And the quickening sun shine brightly,

And the latter wind blow lightly,
And my garden teem with spices.
(Christina Rossetti; Amen)

"All suffices reckoned rightly." We are able to break the bonds of our exile when we understand that we have been empowered to create eternal realities with our Mitzvot, prayer, and Torah study.

Who straightens the bent:

Then loudly cried the bold Sir Bedivere:
"Ah! my Lord Arthur, whither shall I go?
Where shall I hide my forehead and my eyes?
For now I see the true old times are dead,
When every morning brought a noble chance,
And every chance brought out a noble knight.
Such times have been not since the light that led
The holy Elders with the gift of myrrh.

But now the whole Round Table is dissolved
Which was an image of the mighty world,
And I, the last, go forth companionless,
And the days darken round me, and the years,
Among new men, strange faces, other minds."
And slowly answered Arthur from the barge: "
The old order changeth, yielding place to new,
And God fulfils himself in many ways,
Lest one good custom should corrupt the world.

Comfort thyself: what comfort is in me?
I have lived my life, and that which I have done
May He within himself make pure! but thou,
If thou shouldst never see my face again,
Pray for my soul.
More things are wrought by prayer
Than this world dreams of.
Wherefore, let thy voice
Rise like a fountain for me night and day.

For what are men better than sheep or goats
That nourish a blind life within the brain,
If, knowing God, they lift not hands of prayer
Both for themselves and those who call them friend?
For so the whole round earth is every way

Bound by gold chains about the feet of God.
But now farewell. I am going a long way
With these thou seest -if indeed I go
(For all my mind is clouded with a doubt)-
To the island-valley of Avilion;
Where falls not hail, or rain, or any snow,
Nor ever wind blows loudly; but it lies

Deep-meadowed, happy, fair with orchard lawns
And bowery hollows crowned with summer sea,
Where I will heal me of my grievous wound."
(Alfred, Lord Tennyson; "The Passing of Arthur")

We have the opportunity to straighten the sin of baseless hatred that led to the destruction of the Second Temple by raising ourselves up from the bent position of sheep and goats, and lifting our hands in prayer for others.

Who spreads out the earth upon the waters:

I saw the world and yesterday!
A flight of Angels tore
It's cover off and Heaven lay
Where Earth had been before.
I walked about the countryside
And saw a cricket pass.
Then, bending closer, I espied
An ecstasy of grass.
(Elizabeth B. Rooney; Eschaton)

Even when we do not have the Beit Hamikdash through which to view the Heavens, we can still bend down and find, "an ecstasy of grass," sparks of Heaven sprinkled throughout the world; sparks through which we can glimpse Heaven.

Who firms man's footsteps:

"These men asked the pilgrims whence they came; and they told them. They also asked them where they had lodged, what difficulties and dangers, what comforts and pleasures, they had met with in the way; and they told them. Then said the men that met them, "You have it but two difficulties more to meet with, and then you are in the City." (John Bunyan; The Pilgrim's Progress)

We acknowledge that with each difficulty with which You present us, You are moving us forward toward our ultimate goal.

Who has provided me my every need:

O sweeter than the marriage-feast,
'Tis sweeter far to me,
To walk together to the kirk

With a goodly company!-
To walk together to the kirk,
And all together pray,
While each to his great Father bends,
Old men, and babes, and loving friends,
And youths and maidens gay!
Farewell, farewell! but this I tell
To thee, thou Wedding-Guest!
He prayeth well, who loveth well
Both man and bird and beast.
He prayeth best, who loveth best
All things both great and small;
For the dear God who loveth us,
He made and loveth all."
(Samuel Taylor Coleridge; The Rime of the Ancient Mariner Part VII)

"He prayeth best, who loveth best All things both great and small; For the dear God who loveth us, He made and loveth all." We are celebrating the powerful role of prayer in empowering us to thrive in exile: By providing us with prayer, the ability to speak to You and to know that You are listening, You have provided us with a means to address our every need.

Who girds Israel with strength:

Three Silences there are: the first of speech,
The second of desire, the third of thought;
This is the lore a Spanish monk, distraught
With dreams and visions, was the first to teach.
These Silences, commingling each with each,
Made up the perfect Silence, that he sought
And prayed for, and wherein at times he caught
Mysterious sounds from realms beyond our reach.
O thou, whose daily life anticipates
The life to come, and in whose thought and word
The spiritual world preponderates.
Hermit of Amesbury! thou too hast heard
Voices and melodies from beyond the gates,
And speakest only when thy soul is stirred!
(Henry Wadsworth Longfellow; The Three Silences of Molinos)

We acknowledge our ability to catch the "Mysterious sounds from realms beyond our reach," which has given us the great strength to survive the devastating challenges of exile.

Who crowns Israel with splendor:

G. K. Chesterton's "The Man Who Was Thursday," features a plot to infiltrate the Central Council of Anarchists, whose 7 members are named for the days of the week, Sunday, Monday,

etc., The main character Gabriel Syme finds himself recruited as a spy first by a regular police officer and then by a mysterious man in a dark room, whose face he never sees.

"Are you the new recruit?" asked the invisible chief, "all right. You are engaged."

Syme, quite swept off his feet, made a feeble fight against this irrevocable phrase.

"I really have no experience," he began.

"No one has any experience," said the other, "of the battle of Armageddon."

"But I am really unfit-"

"You are willing, that is enough," said the unknown.

"Well, really," said Syme, "I don't know of any profession of which mere willingness is the final test."

"I do," said the other, "martyrs. I am condemning you to death. Good day."

Thus it was that when Gabriel Syme came out again into the crimson light of evening, in his shabby black hat and shabby, lawless code, he came out a member of the New Detective Corps for the frustration of the great conspiracy. Before he had finally left the police premises his friend provided him with a small blue card, on which was written "The Last Crusade," and a number, the sign of his official authority.

There are times when our job as, "A Light unto the nations," seems a death sentence, and yet, we, as does Syme in this story, carry our "small blue card," with pride in our authority as official members of the corps to battle the great conspiracy of evil. We declare with this blessing, the pride of our Crown of Splendor, despite its great costs.

Who removes sleep from my eyes and slumber from my eyelids. And may it be Your will ...:

"Sleeping is thick arras or ambace, like an alcatraz across water." (Brian Teare, Sight Map: Poems)

We often do not have the clarity to perceive God's messages to us personally, or to the world; it is often as if we are sleeping. We acknowledge the blessing of clarity that comes through Torah that keeps our minds sharp and allows us to catch God's messages and understand them. The remainder of the blessing is a request for the things we need to maintain that clarity.

Pesukei D'zimrah

Hodu: Travels With The Ark

By Rabbi Simcha Weinberg

1) The Ark Leads The Way

"So they set out from the mountain of God and traveled for three days. The Ark of the covenant of God went before them during those three days to find them a place to rest. The cloud of God was over them by day when they set out from the camp.

Whenever the Ark set out, Moses said, "Rise up, Oh God! May Your enemies be scattered; May Your foes flee before You." Whenever it came to rest, he said, "Return, Oh God, to the countless thousands of Israel (Numbers 10:33-36)."

2) The Ark Leads us Into the Promised Land

After three days the officers went throughout the camp giving orders to the people: "When you see the Ark of the covenant of God, your Lord, and the priests, who are Levites, carrying it, you are to move out from your positions and follow it. Then you will know which way to go, since you have never been this way before. But keep a distance of about a thousand yards between you and the ark; do not go near it."

Joshua told the people, "Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow God will do amazing things among you." Joshua said to the priests, "Take up the ark of the covenant and pass on ahead of the people." So they took it up and went ahead of them.

And God said to Joshua, "Today I will begin to exalt you in the eyes of all Israel, so they may know that I am with you as I was with Moses. Tell the priests who carry the Ark of the covenant: 'When you reach the edge of the Jordan's waters, go and stand in the river.' (Joshua 3:2-8)

3) The Ark in Exile:Echoes of the Churban

The Philistines deployed their forces to meet Israel, and as the battle spread, Israel was defeated by the Philistines, who killed about four-thousand of them on the battlefield.

When the soldiers returned to camp, the elders of Israel asked, "Why did God bring defeat upon us today before the Philistines? Let us bring the Ark of God's covenant from Shiloh, so that it may go with us and save us from the hand of our enemies."

So the people sent men to Shiloh, and they brought back the Ark of the Covenant of God, Almighty, Who is enthroned between the cherubim. And Eli's two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, were there with the Ark of the covenant of the Lord.

When the Ark of God's covenant came into the camp, all Israel raised such a great shout that the ground shook. Hearing the uproar, the Philistines asked, "What's all this shouting in the Hebrew camp?" When they learned that the Ark of God had come into the camp, the Philistines were afraid. "A Power has come into the camp," they said. "We're in trouble! Nothing like this has happened before.

Woe to us! Who will deliver us from the hand of these mighty gods? They are the gods who struck the Egyptians with all kinds of plagues in the desert.

Be strong, Philistines! Be men, or you will be subject to the Hebrews, as they have been to you. Be men, and fight!"

So the Philistines fought, and the Israelites were defeated and every man fled to his tent. The slaughter was very great; Israel lost thirty-thousand foot soldiers.

The Ark of the Lord was captured, and Eli's two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, died (I Samuel 4:2-11)."

4) The Ark Returns From Exile:

They brought the Ark of the Lord and set it inside the tent that David had pitched for it, and they presented burnt offerings and fellowship offerings before the Lord.

After David had finished sacrificing the burnt offerings and fellowship offerings, he blessed the people in the name of God. Then he gave a loaf of bread, a cake of dates and a cake of raisins to each Israelite man and woman. He appointed some of the Levites to minister before the Ark of God, to make petition, to give thanks, and to praise God, the Lord of Israel: Asaph was the chief, Zechariah second, then Jeiel, Shemiramoth, Jehiel, Mattithiah, Eliab, Benaiah, Obed-Edom and Jeiel. They were to play the lyres and harps, Asaph was to sound the cymbals, and Benaiah and Jahaziel the priests were to blow the trumpets regularly before the Ark of the covenant of the Lord (I Chronicles 16:1-6)."

Psalm 30: Mizmor Shir Chanukas Habeis: Intentions: Inauguration, by David

Our Intention to rebuild God's Home.

"After the king was settled in his palace and God had given him rest from all his enemies around him, he said to Nathan the prophet, "Here I am, living in a palace of cedar, while the Ark of the Lord remains in a tent." Nathan replied to the king, "Whatever you have in mind, go ahead and do it, for God is with you." That night the word of God came to Nathan, saying: "Go and tell my servant David, 'This is what God says:

Are you the one to build me a house to dwell in? I have not dwelt in a house from the day I brought the Israelites up out of Egypt to this day. I have been moving from place to place with a tent as my dwelling. Wherever I have moved with all the Israelites, did I ever say to any of their rulers whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, "Why have you not built me a house of cedar?" ' "

"Now then, tell my servant David, 'This is what God, Almighty, says: I took you from the pasture and from following the flock to be ruler over my people Israel.

I have been with you wherever you have gone, and I have cut off all your enemies from before you. Now I will make your name great, like the names of the greatest men of the earth.

And I will provide a place for my people Israel and will plant them so that they can have a home of their own and no longer be disturbed. Wicked people will not oppress them anymore, as they did at the beginning and have done ever since the time I appointed leaders over my people Israel. I will also give you rest from all your Enemies."

'God declares to you that God Himself will establish a house for you: When your days are over and you rest with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, who will come from your own body, and I will establish his kingdom.

He is the one who will build a house for My Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his father, and he will be My son. When he does wrong, I will punish him with the rod of men, with floggings inflicted by men.

But My love will never be taken away from him, as I took it away from Saul, whom I removed from before you. Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before Me; your throne will be established forever.' "

Nathan reported to David all the words of this entire revelation (II Samuel7:1-17)."

Psalm 67: Lametzach B'neginos: A Vision of the Messiah

"Here is My servant, whom I uphold, My chosen one in whom I delight; I will put My Spirit on him and he will bring justice to the nations. He will not shout or cry out, or raise his voice in the streets. A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out. In faithfulness he will bring forth justice; he will not falter or be discouraged till he establishes justice on earth. In his law the islands will put their hope."

This is what the Lord, God, says: He Who created the heavens and stretched them out, Who spread out the earth and all that comes out of it, Who gives breath to its people, and life to those who walk on it:

"I, God, have called you in righteousness; I will take hold of your hand. I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the nations, to open eyes that are blind, to free captives from prison and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness. "I am God; that is My Name! I will not give My glory to another or My praise to idols.

See, the former things have taken place, and new things I declare; before they spring into being I announce them to you." Sing to God a new song, His praise from the ends of the earth, you who go down to the sea, and you that is in it, you islands, and all who live in them. Let the desert and its towns raise their voices; let the settlements where Kedar lives rejoice. Let the people of Sela sing for joy; let them shout from the mountaintops. Let them give glory to God and proclaim His praise in the islands. God will march out like a mighty man, like a warrior He will stir up his zeal; with a shout He will raise the battle cry and will triumph over his enemies (Isaiah 42:1-13)."

Ashrei (Kinah 13)

Written by Machberes Avodas Hashem

In Psalm 145:19, we read, "He will fulfill the desire of them who fear Him." But we must first express a wise desire, one that reflects Awe of God. Ask yourself, do you offer prayer voicing your desire for wise things, such as fine children, acuteness in Torah study, and endowment with a lofty soul? Do your desires reflect Awe of God? (Michtevei haRav Chafetz Chaim, page 108)

We, of course, want God to fulfill all the desires we express in our prayers. However, it is easy to fall into a trap during the Three Weeks of asking for less lofty things than those which we truly desire. We fall into the trap of asking for an end to our suffering rather than asking for opportunities to achieve greatness. Especially during our current challenges of COVID, we may forget that our real goal is to grow, not necessarily to see salvation. In fact, it is difficult for us to ask for anything during this period of suffering because we feel inadequate. Therefore, it is more important during the Three Weeks to express our highest desires and aspirations, not as people who are suffering and need salvation, but as people who desire the unlimited greatness possible for those who have awe of God.

Ashrei: Singing to Heal: Singing so We Can Sing More

"Now the spirit of God had departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from God tormented him. Saul's attendants said to him, "See, an evil spirit from the Lord is tormenting you. Let our lord command his servants here to search for someone who can play the harp. He will play when the evil spirit from the Lord comes upon you, and you will feel better."

So Saul said to his attendants, "Find someone who plays well and bring him to me."

One of the servants answered, "I have seen a son of Jesse of Bethlehem who knows how to play the harp. He is a brave man and a warrior. He speaks well and is a fine-looking man. And God is with him."

Then Saul sent messengers to Jesse and said, "Send me your son David, who is with the sheep."

So Jesse took a donkey loaded with bread, a skin of wine and a young goat and sent them with his son David to Saul. David came to Saul and entered his service. Saul liked him very much, and David became one of his armor-bearers. Then Saul sent word to Jesse, saying, "Allow David to remain in my service, for I am pleased with him."

Whenever the spirit from the Lord came upon Saul, David would take his harp and play. Then relief would come to Saul; he would feel better, and the evil spirit would leave him (I Samuel 16:14-23)."

Psalm 146: Halleluka 1: Finding the Small Things to Discover God

Flower in the crannied wall,
I pluck you out of the crannies,
I hold you here, root and all, in my hand,
Little flower - but if I could understand
What you are, root and all, and all in all,
I should know what God and man is.
(Alfred, Lord Tennyson; Flower in the Crannied Wall)

"The Maker of heaven and earth,
The sea, and everything in them
Who remains faithful forever.
He upholds the cause of the oppressed
And gives food to the hungry.
God sets prisoners free,
God gives sight to the blind,
God lifts up those who are bowed down,
God loves the righteous.
God watches over the alien
And sustains the fatherless and the widow,
But He frustrates the ways of the wicked."

The verses transition from, "Maker of heaven and earth," to the hungry, blind, widows and orphans. We praise God to Whom the flower in the crannied wall matters as much as the heaven and earth. We commit ourselves to look for the small signs of His love and creation, so that we can better "know" Him.

Psalm 147: Halleluka 2: Healer of the Brokenhearted so They Can Sing

For the truth itself,
That's neither man's nor woman's, but just God's;
None else has reason to be proud of truth:
Himself will see it sifted, disenthralled,
And kept upon the height and in the light,
As far as, and no farther, than 'tis truth;
For, - now He has left off calling firmaments
And strata, flowers and creatures, very good,-
He says it still of truth, which is His own.
Truth, so far, in my book; - the truth which draws
Through all things upwards; that a twofold world
Must go to a perfect cosmos. Natural things
And spiritual, - who separates those two
In art, in morals, or the social drift,
Tears up the bond of nature and brings death,
Paints futile pictures, writes unreal verse,
Leads vulgar days, deals ignorantly with men,
Is wrong, in short, at all points. We divide
This apple of life, and cut it through the pips,-
The perfect round which fitted Venus' hand
Has perished utterly as if we ate
Both halves. Without the spiritual, observe,
The natural's impossible; - no form,
No motion! Without sensuous, spiritual
Is inappreciable; - no beauty or power!
And in this twofold sphere the twofold man
(And still the artist is intensely a man)
Holds firmly by the natural, to reach
The spiritual beyond it, - fixes still
The type with mortal vision, to pierce through,
With eyes immortal, to the antetype
Some call the ideal, - better called the real,
And certain to be called so presently,
When things shall have their names
(Elizabeth Barrett Browning; Earth's Crammed With Heaven)

Psalm 148: Halleluka 3: Each Creation Has Its Song

Let this day's air praise the Lord -
Rinsed with gold, endless, walking the fields,
Blue and bearing the clouds like censers,
Holding the sun like a single note
Running through all things, a basso profundo
Rousing the birds to an endless chorus.
Let the river throw itself down before him,
The rapids laugh and flash with his praise,
Let the lake tremble about its edges
And gather itself in one clear thought
To mirror the heavens and the reckless gulls
That swoop and rise on its glittering shores
(Robert Siegel: Rinsed with Gold)

Shema

Shema: Mitzvah Planters

Written by Machberes Avodas Hashem

"God does mighty deeds. He does things entirely new, plants the seeds of Tzedakot, good and just acts, thereby causing Yeshu'ot, awesome life-saving acts to flourish, creates new cures, works wonders, makes Creation happen every day (Blessings of Morning Shema)."

"God, the Lord, planted a garden in Eden (Genesis 2:8)."

"When you arrive in the Land, plant all kinds of fruit trees (Vayikra 19:23)."

Rabbi Yehudah son of Rabbi Simon opened his lesson: Just as, at the beginning of Creation, God took time to plant, as the verse says, "God, the Lord, planted a garden in Eden," so, too, with you; when you enter the Land of Israel, you should start right away by planting (Vayikra Rabbah 25:3).

What does God plant now? He "plants the seeds of Tzedakot, good and just acts," and as the prayer continues later, "God raises those who feel low; frees those who are captive; redeems the humbled; does what is necessary to remove the misery of poverty from the lives of the poor, and responds to His people at the time they cry out to Him."

Each act of Tzedakah is planted and causes Yeshu'ot, awesome life-saving acts to flourish, and leads to new cures, wonders and joy. The Three Weeks is the time of the year when we are most focused on the need for Yeshu'ot, and therefore is the time we can bring these words of prayer to life by becoming Tzedaka Planters. This is, teaches Rabbi Yehudah in the Midrash above, how we can build Israel, and regain the Garden of Eden! Even during this pandemic, we can use our actions and tefillot to plant the seeds of redemption.

Ahava Rabbah

Written by Machberes Avodas Hashem

In Tanna d'Bei Eliyahu Zuta 2, God's qualities are enumerated. One quality is satisfaction with His lot. We are taught that Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin asked his rebbi, the Vilna Gaon the meaning of this statement. The Gaon replied, "The statement means that God is satisfied with His people, Israel, no matter in what state He finds them. God still loves us, even though our state of holiness is far below that of our fathers." (Michtevai haRav Chafetz Chaim, page 47)

The blessing immediately before the Shema, both in the morning and evening, declare God's love for us: "Who chooses His people Israel with love," and "Who loves His nation Israel." It is at this point when we declare God's love for Israel, just before He demands, in the Shema, that we love Him, when we can say to God, "We have been taught that Your love for us is expressed in Your being satisfied with our state of holiness no matter how lacking we may be. We therefore request that You express that love, that satisfaction with our state of holiness, by speedily redeeming us and rebuilding Jerusalem."

Shemoneh Esrei

Gevurot: Empowerment

Written by Machberes Avodas Hashem

The Breslover taught, "Some people hesitate to speak to God in an intimate manner. They lack the audacity that accompanies holiness. Let them recollect, however, that they must constantly battle a mighty enemy, their Evil Inclination. Should then an insignificant thing restrain them? It is like a general who orders an attack on a fort only to retreat because some cobwebs hang down from the walls (Hishtapchut haNefesh, page 21a)."

The period of the Three Weeks is certainly a time when we hesitate to speak directly to God. It is a time of destruction and tragedy, and we often feel disempowered. However, it is specifically at such a time when our prayers are most needed. This is the time when we must pray with the greatest audacity.

The second blessing of the Amidah is Gevurot- Empowerment. We must use this empowerment to build up the necessary audacity to pray that this Three Weeks not conclude with the destruction of Tisha B'Av, but with the 9th of Av as a day of rejoicing because the Temple has been rebuilt.

Ata Chonen L'Adam Daas: Pirkei Avot: Teachers

By Machberes Avodas Hashem

The Chatam Sofer said, " We read in Pirkei Avot (3:21),' Where there is no knowledge there is no understanding.' Knowledge is acquired from a teacher, understanding from a person's own mind. Understanding, however, must be based upon knowledge to be correct. Very seldom are original ideas correct unless the thinker has learned the rules of logic and the laws of derivation formulated by experienced sages." (Chut ha-Meshulash)

In the fourth blessing of the Amidah, when we pray for knowledge and understanding, we should insert a prayer for the part of Redemption that will restore our teachers of knowledge so that we will be able to fully use our understanding.

Bareich Aleinu: Abundance

Written by: Machberes Avodas Hashem

The Ropshitzer was told that his master, the Rimanofer, blessed a man, and that the man was becoming richer every day. He inquired why this man deserved to receive a blessing of such magnitude. The Rimanofer replied, "I merely blessed him that he might enjoy a comfortable living. But the man gives away so much to charity that his fortune must be increased abundantly by Heaven, so that he may have sufficient for his personal comforts." (Ohel Naftali, page 35)

"Bless this year for us, God, our Lord, and all its types of produce for good. Grant blessing on the face of the earth, and from its goodness satisfy us, blessing our year as the best of years." I often wonder how we can recite this prayer on Tisha B'Av, when Jerusalem was destroyed, we were sent into exile, and we had lost everything. Perhaps if we can say that we use the little we have to give to others, which is something that we have witnessed during this pandemic; people did as much as they could despite the difficulty involved, we have the right to ask for abundant blessing even during the most devastating period of the Jewish calendar.

Tika Beshofar Gadol: Languages of Exile

Written by Machberes Avodas Hashem

"Open your heart to God and tell Him your worries in any language you choose. Since you possess the right to petition Him, why remain inarticulate (Michtevai haRav Chafetz Chaim, page 96)!"

During the Three Weeks, when we mourn being in exile, we must remember that exile has taught us many languages, and therefore empowers us to express our prayers in those languages. We were scattered across the entire world, and we were forced to learn the tongue of so many different nations, but this painful ordeal has given us a special tool. It would seem that we are more empowered to speak in any language in prayer during the Three Weeks than in any other period of the year!

Tika Beshofar Gadol: Kibutz Galuyot-Gathered in Honor

Written by Machberes Avodas Hashem

"Sound the great shofar for our freedom, raise the banner to gather our exiles and speedily gather us together from the four comers of the earth to our Land." The opposite of being gathered in a besieged city is the ingathering of the exiles.

"He will raise a banner for the nations and gather the exiles of Israel; He will assemble the scattered people of Judah from the four quarters of the earth (Isaiah 11:12)." The Holy One, Blessed is He, will raise a banner for all the nations of the world to see, and it will inspire them to send the dispersed of Israel back home in great honor. (Redak)

The closing blessing is, "Who gathers in the dispersed of His people Israel," phrased in the present, to say that it is possible to access this aspect of Divine Providence in this moment. Focus on this blessing on Tisha b'Av as the counterbalance of the exile from Jerusalem.

Hashiva Shofteinu: The Root of A Decision

By Rabbi Simcha Weinberg in Holidays, Spiritual Growth

Psychopaths shed light on a crucial subset of decision-making that's referred to as morality. Morality can be a squishy, vague concept, and yet, at its simplest level, it's nothing but a series of choices about how we treat other people. When you act in a moral manner - when you recoil from violence, treat others fairly, and help strangers in need - you are making decisions that take people besides yourself into account. You are thinking about the feelings of others, sympathizing with their states of mind.

This is what psychopaths can't do. They are missing the primal emotional cues that the rest of us use as guides when making moral decisions. The absence of emotion makes the most basic moral concepts incomprehensible. G. K. Chesterton was right: "The madman is not the man who has lost his reason. The madman is the man who has lost everything except his reason."

At first glance, the connection between morality and the emotions might be a little unnerving. Moral decisions are supposed to rest on a firm logical and legal foundation. Doing the right thing means carefully weighing competing claims, like a dispassionate judge. "Moral judgment is like aesthetic judgment," writes Jonathan Haidt, a psychologist at the University of Virginia. "When you see a painting, you usually know instantly and automatically whether you like it. If someone asks you to explain your judgment, you confabulate. Moral arguments are much the same; two people feel strongly about an issue, their feelings come first, and their reasons are invented on the fly, to throw at each other."

Benjamin Franklin said it best in his autobiography; "So convenient a thing it is to be a reasonable creature, since it enables one to find or make a reason for everything one has a mind to do." (Jonah Lehrer-How We Decide)

There is a powerful reason why our Avodah, or Spiritual Work, during the Three Weeks of Mourning is focused on our emotions; no matter how reasonable we may be, we base our decisions on our emotions. The Sages wanted us to identify the negative emotions that led to the disastrous decisions that fed Jerusalem's destruction. "The Children of Israel cried for no reason when they heard the Spies' report. I will therefore give them a reason to cry!" Powerful negative emotions fed their decision to reject God and lose hope. The Sages teach us to identify those negative emotions and transform them, not the decisions, but the emotions, into healthier emotions that nurture moral decisions.

We are feeding negative emotions and decisions when we practice mourning during the Three Weeks without a sense of what we can accomplish. We are grabbing hold of the same negative emotions that led to all the Tisha B'Av in our history. We must use the Three Weeks to identify the negative emotions that attempt to assert control over our moral decisions.

V'leYerushalayim-Eternal Experiences

Written by Machberes Avodas Hashem

"And Malkitzedek, King of Shalem (Genesis 14:18)," Malkitzedek, who was Shem the son of Noach, named the place Shalem. Avraham, however, called the place, "Hashem yireh (See Genesis 22:14). Therefore, God said, "If I call the place Shalem as Shem called it, I shall be annulling the words of My beloved Avraham, who called it Yireh. If I name the place Yireh, I shall be annulling the words of the righteous Shem who called it Shalem." What did the Holy One, Blessed is He, do? He combined what the two of them called it. Avraham called it Yireh, Shem called it Shalem, and the Holy One, Blessed is He, called it Yerushalayim. (Midrash Tehillim 76:3)

We ask God to build Jerusalem, Binyan Olam, as an Eternal Structure, meaning more than buildings that will last; we ask that just as Shem's experience of the place as "Shalem," the place of wholeness and perfection, and Avraham's experience of the place as "Yireh," the place on which God focuses His attention on the individual, live eternally in the Holy City's name; so, too, God should "build" Jerusalem as a city in which all of our experiences of the place shall be eternal.

Shema Koleinu: Hear Our Voices

By: Machberes Avodas Hashem

Rabbi Chaim of Tzanz passed by a synagogue and heard the voice of a student reciting passages from a volume of Jewish law. He was captivated by the student's earnestness, until, after a long while, his son prevailed upon him to leave.

The Tzanzer remarked, "I was so attracted by a voice reciting Torah for its own sake that I was unable to move from the spot. Had I received an invitation to enter Paradise, I would not have budged a single step!" (Pe'eir Yitzchak, page 14)

"Listen to our voices, God, our Lord," opens the 16th blessing of the Amidah. We can only pray for God to hear all of our voices if we honor the voices of prayer and Torah study we hear from others as did the Tzanzer in the above story. This is especially important during the Three Weeks when we mourn the Temple that was destroyed because of hatred.

Ritzei-V'techezana Eineinu

Written by Rabbi Joseph. Written in the merit of Yaakov ben Leah

It is one thing to ask God to allow us to witness His return to Zion with our own eyes in the future, when it will actually happen. It is quite another thing to request that God give us a vision of the Redemption now, while we are still constrained by the chains of exile.

"V'Techezana", I want to have a "Chazon" experience. Please help my inner eyes envision Your Glory filling Jerusalem right now. Please help me rejoice not just in the belief that it will ultimately happen, but let me be exhilarated in the expectation, in the waiting itself.

Maybe, the "B'Rachamim" doesn't simply indicate that when God will eventually restore His Presence to Zion, He will do so with compassion. The greatest expression of God's Rachamim is that He allows us to dream this vision in our present state; this alone should fill us with tremendous joy. The First Tanna is of the opinion that Jerusalem was not apportioned to any of the tribes, while Rabbi Judah was of the opinion that it was apportioned to certain tribes. Their difference is the same as that of the following Tannaim, as it has been taught, What [part of Jerusalem] was in the portion of Judah? The Temple Mount, the priestly chambers, and the courts. And what was in the portion of Benjamin? The hall, and the sanctuary, and the holy of holies. A strip projected from the portion of Judah into the portion of Benjamin, and in it the altar of sacrifice was built, and every day the righteous Benjamin fretted over it, desiring to swallow it up, as it says, "Crouching over it all the day." Therefore, Benjamin was privileged to become the host of the Shechinah. The following Tanna, however, held that Jerusalem was not apportioned to any of the tribes, as it has been taught, "People cannot let out houses in Jerusalem as they do not belong to them. Rabbi Eleazar bar Zadok says: They may not hire out beds either. Therefore householders who took in guests would seize the skins of visitors' sacrifices forcibly." Abaye remarked: We may see from this that it is good manners for a man to leave his empty wine-flask and his skin-rug at his guest-house. (Megillah 26a)

Imagine hundreds of thousands of people arriving in Jerusalem for Pesach, and having the right to stay in any home because the city belongs to no one and all. How did the "homeowners" in Jerusalem feel? This repeatedly happened all year, each one of the Festivals and people coming to bring their Bikkurim and offerings. The hosts were not permitted to charge. The guests were urged to bring or leave gifts in lieu of payment.

We entered Jerusalem as owners of the city! We must view Jerusalem as we do our homes in the way we protect and care for her. We pray for our city, our home, our place. On one occasion, a man read in the presence of Rabbi Elazar, "Make known to Jerusalem her abominations (Ezekiel 16:2)." Rabbi Elazar said to him, 'While you are investigating the abominations of Jerusalem, go and investigate the abominations of your own mother. Inquiries were made into his birth, and he was found to be illegitimate. (Megillah 25b)

Rabbi Elazar could hear from the way the man read a verse that he had a negative view of Jerusalem. The man recalled the mistakes and destruction. He unlovingly repeated Yechezkail's criticisms. Rabbi Elazar immediately understood that the man was speaking from an impure source. Jerusalem demanded and demands a higher standard of behavior. Mistakes are more blatant in God's Holy City. When we pray that God rebuild Jerusalem, we commit ourselves to live at the high level demanded by the Holy City.

Nine Days: Amidah: Living With Salvation

Written by Machberes Avodas Hashem

"For we hope for Your salvation all the day." When a soul is brought forward into its final judgment they ask her, "Did you await salvation?" (Shabbat 31a) The questions is; "Did you live in such a manner that all you did was a reflection of a world in which salvation is possible?" This is the true meaning of "waiting for the salvation!" (Mei Marom, Volume 13, Page 106)

Modim (Kinah 13)

Written by Machberes Avodas Hashem

The Chafetz Chaim taught: "Every man enters this world with a certain endowment. It behooves him to make use of his endowment, for he will be held accountable regarding it (Michtevai haRav Chafetz Chaim, page 51)."

"Because you did not serve God, your Lord, amid gladness and goodness of heart, when everything was abundant (Deuteronomy 28:47)." The Torah reminds us that one of the primary reasons for the exile and the suffering of the diaspora is that we do not properly appreciate our abundance and endowments. It is appropriate during the period of the Three Weeks to pay special attention to all of the abundance in our lives, especially focusing on our endowments, the gifts God has given us to achieve our potential.

Make a list of your special talents and gifts and use that list when reciting the Modim - Thank You prayer in the Amidah.

Elokai Nitzor Leshoni Merah: Murder!

By Machberes Avodas Hashem

The disciples of Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Rimanov entered into a covenant and signed a scroll, wherein they made a vow: "This is a Covenant of Fellowship in a search for the truth and an everlasting striving after righteousness and humble bearing. We who signed it, essay with all our might to return to God, that a wall may separate us no more from His Holiness and His law."

Whatever they decreed, they entered upon that scroll, as for example: "Resolved to abstain from words of scolding and denunciation, which our Holy Rabbi has barred as transgressing the law against murder. (Emet l'Yaakov, page 53)

Murder was one of the 3 cardinal sins that led to the destruction of the First Temple. We must resolve, especially during the Three Weeks, to abstain from all forms of murder, including murder through speech.

Shemoneh Esrei: Elokai Nitzor Leshoni Merah: Sensitivity

By Machberes Avodas Hashem

At the wedding of his grandson, many rabbis delivered orations, but the Chafetz Chaim remained silent. He later explained, "When I wish to speak, I gather together my own audience who wish me to be the sole speaker. But I do not care to speak in a company. If my speaking is appreciated more than any other's, this person feels as if I had robbed him of his honor (Michtevei haRav Chafetz Chaim, page II, Page 30)."

During the Three Weeks, when we mourn the destruction of the Second Temple that was destroyed because of our hatred for one another, it is wise to practice the level of sensitivity demonstrated by the Chafetz Chaim, and be certain that we pay attention to all the feelings of those around us.

If many people are participating in a conversation, pause before speaking and consider whether your words will lead to someone else remaining unheard and hurting his feelings. When speaking with a child it is important to always remember that despite the fact that we must educate the child, it is important that the child feel that he is heard. We must repair the sin of hatred not only in our dealings with others, but especially so with those close to us.

Mourners' Kaddish: Honoring the Mourners

By: Machberes Avodas Hashem

Rabbi Yossi the son of Rabbi Bun said: "Those who stand in the presence of the dead at a funeral are not standing in honor of the deceased, but rather in honor of those who are performing an act of loving kindness for the deceased (Jerusalem Talmud, Bikkurim 3:3)." Rabbi Yossi is reminding us of our obligation to honor those who perform acts of loving kindness for the deceased. During the Three Weeks we should pay attention to and honor those who perform acts of loving kindness for the destroyed Jerusalem and Temple!

There are people who assiduously work to restore that which has been destroyed both physically and spiritually. We live in a time when we are privileged to be able to physically work on rebuilding Jerusalem. These are the people who are performing acts of loving kindness for the deceased.

Those who work on repairing the sins that lead to the destruction of the Temple, especially the sin of baseless hatred, and work to help people build and rebuild relationships, and to create an environment in which we all admire, respect, and love each other, are doing the spiritual acts of loving kindness for the deceased.

We are taught that those who mourn the destruction of the Beit Hamikdash are actively working to rebuild it. The mourners are performing an act of Chesed for the deceased. Even if we do not know how to become active participants in these acts of loving kindness for the deceased we can at least follow Rabbi Yossi's teaching and honor those performing the Chesed.

Birchat Hamazon

Birchat HaMazon

By: Machberes Avodas Hashem

The Chafetz Chaim taught: "At the conclusion of the main portion of Grace after Meals we add a series of, 'May the All Merciful.' We add numerous such petitions, indicating that a request to God after the performance of a mitzvah is especially acceptable before Him (Michtevai haRav Chafetz Chaim, page 45)."

One of the primary issues of the Exile is, "You wrapped Yourself in a cloud that no prayer can pierce (Lamentations 3:44)." It is more difficult to pray during the Three Weeks than other times during the year because we experience this "cloud." With COVID unfortunately around, this year proves to be even more difficult because our time in shul has changed drastically, and we have never experienced the pain of the three weeks while in a situation similar to the present state of the world. We can use this strategy of the Chafetz Chaim, that of praying immediately after the performance of a mitzvah, so that we may feel that our prayers will be more acceptable before God.

It should be a mitzvah we usually do not perform before prayer. People who are not in the habit of making a gift to charity before prayer should do so. People who are already in the habit of offering charity, should perform an act of kindness, such as calling someone who is lonely, ill, or in mourning.

Tefillah on Tisha B'av

Amidah

The First Blessing: "My Master! Open my lips, that my mouth may declare Your praise."

Evening: Jeremiah said, "You have covered Yourself with a cloud, so that prayer should not pass through (Lamentations 3:44)." I want to declare Your praise even if my prayers will not be heard!

Morning: "Turn us to You, Oh God, and we shall be turned; renew our days as of old; unless You have utterly rejected us; and are exceedingly angry against us - Turn us to You, Oh God, and we shall be turned; renew our days as of old (Lamentations 5:21-22- repeating 21)." We have not waited for You to return us to you, but reached out first, despite knowing our prayers would not be heard; so now, "Open my lips, so my mouth may declare Your praise in a way that You will hear and accept!"

Afternoon: "He has called this day a Festival (Lamentations 1:15)," as we read this verse, so please allow my prayers to join Yours and for You to come and greet them at a Moed - a meeting, or fixed place.

Avot

Evening: We still acknowledge You as the Source of all Blessing even though You destroyed Your home and exiled us.

You judge each of us as our Lord, as You judge the entire nation; expressing even in the judgments meted out on Tisha B'Av, that our actions matter to You - You care about us. You are the Power, Expansive even in the Tisha B'Av punishments, Mighty in action against Your own Temple, and awesome in keeping us alive and vibrant in Exile.

You are above all powers and were the One Who empowered the Babylonians and Romans to destroy Jerusalem, yet, You continued to sustain and empower us to survive and thrive, and demonstrated that You are Master of all by keeping us alive through the ages.

You continue to relate to us as You promised the Patriarchs, and, even at this moment, we believe You will bring the Redeemer, if only for the sake of Your Name.

You help us when we are helpless, You Save us when we reach out to You, and You shield us when we attach to You as You shielded Abraham from the fire of the furnace, and as You saved us from the countless fires of the Diaspora.

Morning: It is in our relationship with You that we find blessing, especially as we refer to You in second person, You, despite Your distance.

We continue to acknowledge You as the Guider of each individual and all of history, as You guided the Patriarchs.

We continue to relate to You as, "The Power, Expansive, Mighty and Awesome," even when Jeremiah and Daniel could not see Your Might and Awesomeness.

We belong to You.

You are the Supreme Power

Who grants us independence through His Kindness,
Empowerer,

We know You remember us even when we experience You as distant, just as You keep the merits of the Patriarch's alive at every moment, keeping us alive through all the Tisha B'Avs of history, eventually bringing the Redeemer, in love.

You are the King even without the Temple, Who helps those who do not actively seek to improve, save those who strive, and shield those who attach to You.

Source of all Blessing, Who shields us as He did Abraham.

Afternoon:

We bless You

Accessible to us even when seemingly distant

Who guides us with direct personal Divine Providence, and with General Providence.

We strive to personalize our relationship with You as did the Patriarchs, so that You will call Yourself by our names as You do as the Lord of Abraham, the Lord of Isaac, and the Lord of Jacob.

We can, because You are the Supreme Power, Who Expands us, Owns and takes responsibility for everyone, and Who allows us to build on the foundations of the Patriarchs so that we can successfully create such love for Your Name that You will send the Redeemer.

The King of all Creation

Who helps us grow from negative experiences, Who saves us each day and Shields us from the unknown. We Bless You

Who Shields the Descendants of Abraham forever.

There are other concepts that are included in this verse.

2) Rabbeinu Yonah; Berachot 3a: says that the end of this pasuk of "Hashem, open..." is that Hashem does not want our sacrifices. This is an indication that David Hamelech was saying that "Since I sinned consciously there is no Korban for me to bring for atonement. Therefore, please Hashem, help me direct my Tefillos properly and to speak of Your wondrous actions, so that my prayer will be accepted and I will be forgiven." The Sages therefore added this verse to our Shemoneh Esrei, now when we have no sacrifices. We too are asking as David, that we are desperate without sacrifices. We know that we have nothing other than prayer. We must have help in directing our tefillot.

An obvious inference is that Tefillah is so powerful that it works even when a sacrifice cannot. This pasuk is the desperate cry of David Hamelech for Hashem to help him daven a prayer that will be effective when sacrifices are not. He has not even begun to pray for forgiveness. At this point, when he realizes that there is no hope for him other than prayer, David is pleading for Hashem's help just to pray properly. If David needed to ask for Hashem's help in davening, certainly we must as well. But, that request for help must be with the same awareness as David. We must realize that this is our only avenue to fix our world and to seek atonement for our sins. David was so overwhelmed by his "sin" with Batshevah that he was terrified even to pray.

2) The Gemara in Berachot 7a asks, "How do we know that Hashem davens?..." This has powerful implications for us in general and more specifically when we recite this verse. The Gemara is saying that not only does Hashem help us daven, He Himself davens to have compassion on us. We are not davening alone. Hashem is also davening. He is not simply helping us pray, He is davening with us.

3) "Who helps, saves and shields us," refers to different levels of Hashgacha Pratis. The level of God's Divine Providence is determined by our awareness and use of it. (See Derech Hashem, Section 2, Chapter 3, paragraph 4.) The three steps of help, saving, and shielding each correspond to a higher level of Hashgacha based on our actions. The lowest level is help. One who is more aware will merit God's saving him from difficult situations, and the most aware will merit being shielded from any harm. (See Teshuvot Rashbah, Vol.5,# 176.)

4) The inclusion of this verse in the Shemoneh Esrei is a reflection of the greatness of human beings, and is the reason the leaders of those who built the second Beit Hamikdash were

called the Men of the Great Assembly. They were "great" for including this phrase in our tefillah. The Gemara in Yoma 69b explains; "Why were they called Men of the Great Assembly? Because they restored the crown of the divine attributes to its completeness. Moshe had said, "God, great, powerful and awesome." Then Yirmeyahu came and said "Nations are destroying His Temple. Where are his "awesome deeds? So he omitted the attribute "Awesome." Daniel came and said, "Nations are enslaving His children. Where are His mighty deeds? So he omitted the attribute "Mighty."

But the Men of the Great Assembly came and said, "On the contrary! Therein lies His Mighty deeds that he suppresses His wrath, that He extends long patience to the wicked. Therein lies His awesomeness: For but for the fear of Him, how could one single nation persist among the many nations!" When the Anshei Knesses HaGedolah added this to our Tefillah they were restoring the glory of Hashem.

There is more. When they acknowledged God's awesomeness and might even in the most desperate of situations they were restoring that level of His Divine Providence to the world. The court of the lower world joined with God to restore a higher level of Hashgacha Pratis.

This speaks of the power of human beings to bring a higher level of Hashgacha to the world. Humans did it. Again, this is a praise of God. He granted us extraordinary power in our relationship with Him. He gave us the ability to work in partnership with Him.

5) This phrase predates the giving of the Torah. It was uttered by Malki Tzedek, king of Shalem to Avraham. It refers to the revelation of Divine Providence without Torah. Malki Tzedek witnessed all that had happened in the major war that Avraham had just miraculously won. He understood that Avraham had been able to win only because he was helped by the hand of God. Malki Tzedek believed in God, but he had never witnessed or even understood that God was so involved with the world. He understood that Avraham was bringing an entirely new view of God to humanity. The words Kail Elyon are the expression of one who was shocked and thrilled to understand the world in an entirely new way. It was a human expression. It was not based on learning or prophecy. It was simply the observation of a human being.

The fact that it was spoken by one who is described as a Kohain L'Kail Elyon, a priest of the God, means that it came from within a relationship. Malki Tzedek could not have understood all that he had seen unless he already had a relationship with Hashem.

This means that those who have a relationship with Hashem can sense His Providence in their own lives and the world, not only from within the Torah. We all have opportunities to recognize Divine Providence in our daily lives. If such recognitions are within a relationship with Hashem, then they are also an acknowledgment of His being a Kail Elyon. The three Avot each understood Hashem from within the Creation. They used these ideas in forming their part of the two-way relationship with Hashem, as can we.

6) Kindness can often create a crushing sense of dependency. All that God gives us in His chesed is done in such a way to make us feel a greater sense of self without feeling crushed. His chesed allows us to work in partnership with Him. He grants us greatness. That is also why we use the word "גומל", which usually means to wean, as in weaning a child. He allows us to feel independent.

7) What each of the Avot accomplished was so real and tangible that we, who live generations later, can benefit from them. This too is a praise of Hashem, (remember, the first three blessings are praises of Hashem.) Hashem created us with the ability to develop our part of the relationship with Him, so that it is not simply something given by Him to us as a gift, so that we switch back and forth from a direct to a distant relationship. He gave us the ability to make it our own, so that we can hold on stronger to the direct relationship.

8) The Ramchal says in the second chapter of Mesillat Yesharim that it is imperative that we understand that we cannot defeat the Yetzer Harah without God's help. Each one of these steps is a proportional response to our efforts in strategizing against the Yetzer Harah. The more one strategizes the more help God gives in fighting the Yetzer Harah, until you can even reach a stage in which God shields you from the Yetzer Harah. This is important to keep in mind as we begin the process of serious Teshuvah. Promises are insufficient. Strategies and planning are absolutely necessary. On this day when Hashem is judging our potential, we must ask for specific help in this area. At this point of the Shemoneh Esrei, at which one may not make requests, one can say, "You, Who help in the battle with the Yetzer Harah will surely help me as I set out to do Teshuvah."

9) In order to give a blessing one must have some control, something to give. If we are giving a bracha to Hashem, that means that there is an area in which we have control. If there is an area in which we have control, it must obviously be a gift from Hashem. The key to this area of control can be found in the words of Chazal when they say:

תלמוד בבלי מסכת ברכות דף לג עמוד ב

Talmud Berachot 33b

הכל בידי שמים חוץ מיראת שמים

"Everything is in the hands of Heaven except for the fear of heaven"

"Except" means that there is an area in our control, and it is that area that gives us the ability to bless Hashem. Our ability to bless Hashem is and implies a bracha to man. It is a bracha to man not only because God has given us that ability, but because Hashem's only interest is to benefit mankind, therefore if He has given us the ability to bless Him, it is for our benefit, not His. This ability also implies a bracha to man by virtue of the fact that the Creator of the world gave us the capacity to bless Him! Hashem has created us with the ability to "give" Him something. He is interested in a two-way relationship. He doesn't want us to be only recipients. He wants us to be givers as well.

10) Accessible in the sense that we are permitted to approach God as, "You," directly.

11) Elokeinu refers to God as the Guider, King and Judge. Elokei Avoteinu means that we relate to Him through His relationship with our Avot. The revelation of God through which He relates to us is not through our recognition of Him, but through the recognition that was set by the Avot. The recognitions of Moshe and David were a continuation of the recognitions of our Avot. Divine Providence is God's direct involvement in the life of each Jew, guiding him and pushing him to grow. General Providence is God's control of the broader development of the world, moving it towards the fulfillment of its purpose.

12) We have switched from speaking to God in second person, addressing Him as "You," to speaking of Him in third person, "He, Who..." We find this switch constantly in our prayers and berachot. We speak of Hashem as "Holy, Holy, Holy, the Lord of Hosts, Who fills the world with His Glory," He fills this world. He is here. "Blessed be the Glory of God from His place," His place, somewhere else, not here. In one verse He is present. In the next, He is removed. The reason for this is that although we have a two-way relationship with Hashem, it was created entirely by one side of the relationship. It is incomplete. It all comes from Him. We must strive to make it our own. This is reflected in the next phrase;

13) Gedula, or greatness is always a synonym for Chesed. Chesed was the motivating force in the creation of the world. It was a burst of creativity that grew and grew. Chesed is enormous. Avraham saw a world filled with creativity and giving, and God wasn't asking for anything in return. There was no service of God. The Torah had not yet been given. Avraham chose to emulate Hashem by giving and giving without asking for anything in return. Avraham not only discovered Hashem on his own, He chose to emulate Him as a way of serving Hashem. He also chose how to emulate God. By doing so Avraham created his part of the two-way relationship.

Gevura, or Din, judgment, brings structure to the world. Yitzchak saw this clearly when he lay bound on a Mizbeach ready to be sacrificed to Hashem. Everything belongs to Hashem. God is in absolute control, and can take what He wants. Yitzchak chose to use this attribute to serve Hashem and to create his part of the two-way relationship.

God's awesomeness is reflected in His ability to balance the Chesed and Din as He guides the world throughout history. Yaacov saw this as he watched all that happened to him in his life and how he was forced to deal with one difficult situation after another. Yaacov chose to emulate Hashem in this manner. He became the great balancer of twelve very powerful personalities, merging them into a whole.

What each of the Avot accomplished was so real and tangible that we, who live generations later, can benefit from them. This too is a praise of Hashem, (remember, the first three blessings are praises of Hashem.) Hashem created us with the ability to develop our part of the relationship with Him, so that it is not simply something given by Him to us as a gift, so that we switch back and forth from a direct to a distant relationship. He gave us the ability to make it our own, so that we can hold on stronger to the direct relationship.

The Second Blessing

Evening: Focus on Resurrection of the Dead: We acknowledge, even in this moment of destruction, even as we experience Your Might being expressed against us, that everything You do is with purpose to perfect the world, and to allow us to perfect ourselves and maximize our portion in the World to Come.

Morning: Focus on Abundantly Able to Save: You will use the same Might expressed against us to save us. Just as You increased Your Attribute of Compassion for Adam, after the sin, You will increase Your compassion for us, who are suffering exile just as did Adam, when expelled from the Garden, with the promise of Resurrection - regaining our place in the Garden.

Afternoon: You are the Empowerer: You will continue to empower us to thrive in Exile and potentially achieve the same status as the Patriarchs - that You will call Yourself by our name - The Lord of Israel.

The Second Blessing

The theme of the second bracha of Shemoneh Esrei is that Hashem has created us with a purpose; to share His goodness with us in Olam Habah, and He will guide us in this world through Divine Providence in order to fulfill that purpose. The mechanics of Hashem's involvement changed a few times at different points of the Creation, and each of those steps is reflected in this Bracha as well.

Resurrection of the Dead, is the final step in fulfilling the purpose of Creation. It will be in תחיית המתים Olam Habah, that God will share His Goodness with us. That goodness begins in this world, where we were given the opportunity and the means to earn that Sharing in Olam Habah by having become masters of ourselves. That opportunity is part of the same commitment that Hashem made to give good unto another. Because that is the driving force behind all existence, Hashem does whatever is necessary to help us master ourselves here so that we can attach ourselves to Him in Olam Habah. Therefore, the commitment of Hashem to share Himself in Olam Habah, is the commitment to guide us in Olam Hazeih. Resurrection of the Dead also demands that He sustain us to maximize our Olam; תחיית המתים demands ...HaBah.

The Third Blessing

Evening: Kedusha - Sanctity as in being Beyond. Although You have removed the primary home of Your Holiness from the physical world, we strive to act with holiness to make a place for Your Presence.

Morning: Present in Our Hearts: "Holy in the most exalted heaven, the abode of His Presence," and You allowed us to bring that Presence from the "most exalted heaven," down into our world through building a Mishkan and Temple, so, too, we are creating a Home, here in this world, for Your Presence, by mourning the loss of the Temple.

Afternoon: Connecting Heaven & Earth: We reconnect to the Songs of Praise of Your Holy Angels, and join Earth to Heaven in singing Your Praises.

The Fourth Blessing

Evening: Free Gifts to the Undeserving: "Chonein," is to grant as a pure gift. Even as we sit in a state of having misused what You taught us to bring Your Presence to this world, leading to the destruction of the Temple, we still beseech You for the Free Gift of Awareness.

Morning: "Teach Insight," through life experiences - we are using even the negative experiences of Tisha B'Av to gain insight into ourselves, our mission, and our purpose. Please allow us to derive everything we can from Tisha B'Av and all associated or resulting from it.

Afternoon: Integration: Allow us to fully integrate Chochmah, Binah, and Da'at - wisdom, insight, and awareness. Please allow us to repair all the breaks in the chain from wisdom - information to reification in our service so that we can fully integrate all we learn in practical ways.

The Fifth Blessing

Evening: Bring Us Back to You: Focus on the penultimate verse of Lamentations, "Bring us back to You, God, and we shall return, renew our days as of old."

Morning: Bring Us Near To Your Service: Empower us to experience every aspect of our service of You in profound and elevating ways, so that we no longer feel that, "You have covered the heavens with clouds to block our prayers."

Afternoon: Ratzon- Divine Will: "Who desires Teshuva." Your Ratzon - Divine Will - creates realities. Please express Your Desire for our Repentance so that it will become an internal reality for us, and we can return to You so much so that Your return to us in the form of redemption.

The Sixth Blessing

Evening: Our Parent: This is the Hebrew month of Av, and You continue to relate to us as a parent to child. Please forgive us as a parent forgives a child.

Morning: Forgiving Ourselves: Please grant us the ability to forgive ourselves even as we reflect on our failings that led to the loss of the Temple.

Afternoon: The Gracious One: Please help us connect to You as "The Gracious One, Who pardons abundantly," without carrying resentment towards You for our suffering.

The Order of Tefillah

The blessings are not gathered together. We interject different supplications between the blessings we listed. We ask for healing and sustenance between blessings seven and ten. We request the crushing of evil and the protection of the righteous between blessings eleven and fourteen.

Although we studied each individual paragraph, I would like to analyze the progression of the blessings. The Talmud¹ explains the progression in the following way: Redemption is the seventh blessing because the wars that will lead to redemption will begin in the seventh year of the Shemittah cycle.² Healing is necessary after a circumcision which takes place on the eighth day. Therefore, healing is the eighth blessing. David mentions sustenance in the ninth chapter of Psalms; hence our prayer for sustenance is the ninth blessing. Another verse in Psalms describes the ingathering of the exiles as immediately following tremendous blessings in our sustenance. Once the exiles have been gathered there will be a judgment against the wicked. Once the wicked have been judged the sinners will be destroyed. Once there are no more sinners the righteous will be raised up. Where will the righteous be honored? They will be venerated in Jerusalem. Once Jerusalem is rebuilt the messiah will come. Once the messiah has come there will be a new power of prayer. Once prayer has risen to new heights we will be able to serve God again in the Temple.

This section of the Talmud explains the progression from the seventh blessing through the seventeenth. Only the eighth and ninth are not presented as automatically following from the previous blessing. The Talmud also says that the sixteenth and seventeenth are part of the progression.

We must study this selection in order to understand the progression and what we are requesting in each blessing; the seventh blessing, redemption, parallels the wars that will lead to the redemption, wars that are the beginning of liberation. We are not praying for the wars. We are praying for the redemption that will follow. More specifically, we are praying for the cycle of events that are needed for the redemption to begin. We are praying for salvation as if we are ignoring the wars and the suffering they will bring. We are focusing on the good and disregarding the bad. I believe that by presenting the redemption in the seventh blessing, which corresponds to the year of war, we are asking for the redemption to occur without the anguish of the wars. Our prayers have the power to change the order of redemption.

It is necessary to focus on this point before we continue with the general discussion. We are praying with the assumption that our supplications possess the power to change the predetermined order of history. This idea means that our prayers are far more powerful than we first imagine. We can literally change the course of history. Our prayers are far more effective if they are recited with an awareness of their power. When we pray without an appreciation of the force of those prayers we weaken them. Judaism emphasizes the importance of awareness of the power of our actions, and that actions with that awareness are all the more forceful as a result of that consciousness. The assumptions behind the blessing of redemption are a compelling statement on the power of prayer. (This should be integrated as a prayer tool.)

Although each of the blessings is addressed to the needs of the entire nation, they have meaning for the individual as well. How can we apply this supplication on a personal level?

Judaism teaches that suffering is sometimes necessary to refine a person before he can be an appropriate receptacle for blessing³. People grow from challenges. Marriage takes work. The pain of the relationship helps each spouse develop into a better partner. Pain not only provides perspective on what is truly important, it also teaches which mistakes to avoid in the future. Suffering refines us⁴. I am not speaking of self-flagellation which is anti-Judaism.

I am speaking on the most basic level of growth from pain. This is true on a national level, which is one aspect of the wars that precede the redemption. It is also true on an individual basis. Just as we can pray that the redemption processes begin without the destined wars we can pray that we as individuals receive blessing without the suffering that possibly must precede them. If someone is suffering he can ask that if his suffering is to purify him in order to receive blessing, that he merit the blessings without the suffering.

Suffering does not only mean catastrophic pain. Frustration is suffering. If someone is frustrated in achieving a goal, he may request that he succeed without that aggravation. (These thoughts should be used as tools for dealing with suffering. You can use this prayer and this perspective; "Am I growing because of these challenges? What have I learned from this experience?")

Let's return to our original discussion. We learned that in the seventh blessing we are praying for the redemption to proceed in a different order than has been predetermined. The eighth blessing, for healing, is explained by the Talmud as describing the healing that follows forgiveness, the topic of the sixth blessing. This blessing, despite being presented as independent of the succession of events, also mentions salvation; "save us and we will be saved." This phrase hints that this blessing does, in some manner, fit into the series of blessings addressing redemption. We have explained that the meaning of the phrase is that God creates the salvation and we are praying for the ability to access what has already been created ill.

We have the healing that results from forgiveness and a prayer that we are granted the ability to access the redemption that has already been prepared. This means that once we are forgiven and healed we will have the ability to access the prepared salvation. This access is also independent of the predetermined order of events. This access means that we can access the salvation without waiting for the seventh year when the cycle of events is to begin. This blessing goes far beyond what we are appealing for in the previous section. The seventh blessing is an application for redemption without suffering. It is a request for God to change the preordained order of events. The eighth blessing is saying, "Now that we have been granted forgiveness, (sixth section), grant us the ability to access the salvation without waiting for the specific year in which it is to occur. We are assuming that our appeal for forgiveness has been granted, another statement on the power of prayer; we proceed with the assumption that our prayers will be granted. (This should be used as a prayer tool.) Now that we have forgiveness, allow us to bring the salvation earlier than destined.

How can this be used on a personal level? Allow me to access the blessings that are stored for me⁶ even if it is early. God is committed to our success in using this world to achieve our purpose and is ready to bless us abundantly⁷. (This should be used in the second blessing of the Amidah when we say that God supports life with kindness. This means that God is committed to our ultimate success.) God wants to bless us and waits until all the blessings stored for us are

appropriate. In this blessing we ask that our prayers succeed to the point that we are ready now to receive the blessings God has for us.

The Talmud's explanation for the placement of the ninth blessing seems weak; because sustenance is mentioned in the ninth chapter of Psalms it must be the ninth blessing. Aren't there other descriptions of sustenance in the bible that are not associated with a specific number? Couldn't we proceed with the steps of liberation without interjecting a plea for sustenance? If the Sages placed this blessing here, in middle of a series of prayers dealing with redemption, they must be telling us that there is a connection. In fact, their explanation of the tenth blessing, the ingathering of the exiles, is presented as a direct progression from the ninth blessing, our appeal for sustenance. Perhaps we should first understand why the gathering of the exiles will follow sustenance, or as Rashi explains⁸, the gathering of the exiles will occur in a year of plenty.

The previous prayers for salvation were for salvation from the midst of difficulties. The seventh blessing asks God to see our suffering. The eighth blessing refers to the need for healing and the need for salvation. The ninth paragraph is asking God to grant us the blessings of Messianic times even before he comes. The tenth blessing is for God to gather the exiles in a time of good. It should be a progression of wonderful things that are happening to us. In the seventh section, we asked for the redemption to come without the destined wars. In this blessing, we are petitioning for more; we are asking that the cycle begin with wonderful things happening, not just the absence of war.

At this point we have made the following requests:

- In the seventh section, we requested that God change the preordained cycle of events and bring the redemption in the seventh year without the destined wars.
- In the eighth blessing, we asked for the ability to access the prepared salvation without waiting for the ordained year.
- In the ninth blessing, we petitioned God to send the blessings of Messianic times even before the messiah comes.
- In the tenth blessing, we asked that the Messiah be a culmination of a time of tremendous good fortune, not a result of war and suffering and not as a salvation from misery.

Each of these requests is dependent on a greater awareness of the power of prayer than its precursor. This is an important concept in the Amidah as a whole; the power of our prayer increases as we progress. Praying increases the power of prayer. (This is an important concept to incorporate as a prayer tool.)

The Talmud continues by saying that once the exiles have been gathered there will be a judgment against the wicked. It is interesting to note that on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur we first speak of the honor of the righteous and then we describe the fall of the wicked. In the standard Amidah we first describe the judgment against the wicked and then their fall. Only after the destruction of the wicked do we describe the honor given to the righteous. The Ramchal⁹ explains that on Rosh Hashanah we are describing a world beginning and in such a situation the righteous will come before the wicked. During the year we are dealing with the reality of the world as we know it. Therefore, the influence of the wicked must be crushed before the righteous can take their place.

(This is an important tool to be used when frustrated with the absence of good in the world. When I was a little boy and had a terrible experience with someone who was perceived by

the community as a Tzaddik, but was clearly an evil man, my father took me to meet a very old man who had the face of an angel. It was clear that this man was a true Tzaddik. It was inspiring just to be in his presence. My father wanted me to touch "good", so to speak, in order to help me deal with my horrible experience. When I later asked why this Tzaddik was not better known, he explained that such people will only be seen for what they truly are once evil has been destroyed. He then showed me the Ramchal I mentioned above. We must first battle evil in order for the good to flourish. It is effective to take small steps in battling evil. Take notice of insignificant acts of injustice and try to do something about them. For example, protest if you hear someone speaking evil of someone else and damaging their reputation. Speak up if you see someone being rude. All these are small steps. However, if they are taken as conscious acts of battling evil you are proactive in raising the profile of righteousness in the world. This should be used as part of the twelfth blessing which is the crushing of evil.)

The crushing of the wicked must begin with the judgment against them. We live in a world in which the wicked seem to prosper. It is a world without justice. Things don't make sense. We see good people suffering. We watch floods, earthquakes, hurricanes and wars that decimate innocent people and children.

In the ninth blessing, we asked for the blessing of Messianic times even before he comes. In the eleventh blessing, we are applying for a world that is just. We are pleading for things to make sense and to see God's justice in everything that happens to the world and to us as individuals. This is a much more powerful request than the one for blessings. This is a plea for a world that makes sense.

We are also requesting that the coming of the Messiah for the Jewish people seems just to all the people of the world. The Semag¹⁰ asks why the Messiah had not yet come in his time. He explains that the Messiah will only come when the nations of the world perceive the Jews as deserving of salvation. The messiah cannot come if we act in a way that causes us to be perceived as undeserving of the privilege of redemption.

We are asking in this blessing for God to restore justice to the world and that He makes it clear that we, the Jewish people, deserve salvation. This blessing implies a terrific standard from us. It means that we are committed to living in such a way that we will be meritorious in judgment. This obviously is a development of the sixth blessing when we asked for forgiveness and the eight blessing when we asked that God heal our souls now that we have been forgiven. This blessing is assuming that we are living with the highest standards of moral behavior. We explained earlier, in the chapter on this blessing, that the restoration of justice will influence us to change and that it is difficult to live at those standards if we do not perceive any justice in the world, or if we feel that God is not taking care of us. The blessing is actually a progression of events in itself. There will first be a restoration of justice that will make us experience God's involvement in our lives. That will influence us to live at the highest standards which will lead to the next stage of justice which will be that the entire world will understand that we merit redemption.

This is a more sophisticated form of prayer. We are asking God to influence us so that we may change and then influence the world. We are not asking God to do something for us. We are asking God to empower us to become better people who can then change the world. We are asking God to transform us as people. This is different from a prayer in which we ask for

redemption as a gift to be granted. We are requesting a relationship of give and take. We are asking to play a role in the redemption. We are asking to be transformed as people so that redemption is not something that is granted but deserved.

We also pray on a personal level to achieve that level of good so that we will serve as an example of God's presence in the world. It is appropriate to insert a prayer to be proper role models for our children and students.

We described how each prayer influences the prayer that follows and makes it more powerful. In this prayer we have reached a point in which our prayers can effect a change in what we are. This is an important concept of prayer. We can use prayer to request God's help in our development as people. We can use prayer to affect growth and development.

At this point we have made the following requests:

- In the seventh section, we requested that God change the preordained cycle of events, and bring the redemption in the seventh year without the destined wars. We pray that God reveal Himself as the Redeemer of Israel without suffering.

- In the eighth blessing, we asked for the ability to access the prepared salvation without waiting for the ordained year. We want God to reveal Himself as the One Who has prepared salvation.

- In the ninth blessing, we petitioned God to send the blessings of Messianic times even before the messiah comes. We appeal to God to reveal Himself as the One Who brings Messianic blessing to the world.

- In the tenth blessing, we asked that the Messiah be a culmination of a time of tremendous good fortune, not a result of war and suffering and not as a salvation from misery. We pray that God is revealed as the One Who gathers the exiles in a time of blessing.

- In the eleventh blessing, we ask that God empower us through the restoration of justice to influence the entire world and to be active participants in bringing the Messiah. We want God to be revealed as the One Who empowers us through the restoration of justice.

It is important to remember how we have seen that our power of prayer develops with each section of this series of prayer.

We should also review the prayer tools that we have identified:

- We pray with the assumption that our supplications possess the power to change the predetermined order of history. This idea means that our prayers are far more powerful than we first imagine. We can literally change the course of history.

- The power of our prayer increases as we progress. Praying increases the power of prayer.

- Our prayers are far more effective if they are recited with an awareness of their power.

- We proceed with the assumption that our prayers will be granted.

- We can use prayer to request God's help in our development as people. We can use prayer to affect growth and development.

The twelfth blessing is our request for God to reveal Himself as the destroyer of sinners and His enemies. We are asking God to destroy all those who negatively influence the world by denying His presence. We are asking God to destroy evil and all its power. We mentioned earlier that the Messiah will not complete his tasks immediately upon arrival. He will work in stages. He

will first gather those who believe in him. He will then introduce true justice and order to the world. He will then battle and destroy evil.

Rashi¹¹ explains that this blessing is a request for a higher level of moral clarity. We are not the only people in the world who believe in God. There are other religions that believe in One God. They have value systems which seem to be consistent with Judaism. In fact, we are often described as part of the Judeo-Christian heritage, stressing how we seem so closely related. Jews are often confused regarding the values of Western civilization. We speak out against war with the same passion as the Christians even though Judaism believes in the necessity of warring against evil. Many Jews share opposition to nuclear arms with the same "moral clarity" of the catholic bishops even though Judaism is not necessarily opposed. People speak of the values of Judaism while picking and choosing which values are important and ignoring others. The influence of Christianity has corrupted our understanding of repentance, free choice and original sin. We have lost our moral clarity. Many Jews accept the Christian claim that the God of the Old Testament is a God of vengeance and the God of the New Testament in one of mercy. The Christians also believe in the idea of a messiah.

When we describe the crushing of evil we are addressing those who distort Jewish values, confusing our understanding of God and the world. As long as we lack moral clarity and a clear vision of Torah values we lose our appreciation of Judaism and what it offers.

We are appealing for the clarity necessary to appreciate Judaism without it being corrupted by the influence of others. Our battle is more sophisticated than that of earlier generations who were exposed to idol worship. Idol worship is clearly and unambiguously against Judaism. Our battle is against those who don't seem to threaten Judaism (I am not referring to missionaries or Jews for Jesus) and who supposedly venerate Jewish beliefs and values. The distinction is often difficult to discern. It is easy to become confused. It is not a black and white battle between good and evil.

In fact, this blessing was composed to draw out Christians who were masquerading as Jews¹². It was almost impossible to tell from outward behavior who was Christian. The rabbis composed this blessing knowing that Christians would not recite it. It was only when someone refused to recite this blessing that we could tell that he was a Christian. Again, this is the idea of people, who are very similar to Jews in many ways, so much so that there was no way to tell the difference. This blessing is a request for the clarity necessary to know what authentic Judaism is and what it is not.

This is a step beyond the restoration of justice. This isn't justice as much as it is freedom from the influence of "good" people who confuse us. We have not had clarity since the time of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. We are praying for a world with that level of clarity.

We actually have everything necessary to achieve that clarity. We have Torah and all the commandments. We have not taken full advantage of Torah and its teachings. We are asking God to grant us what we should have achieved on our own. The composition and inclusion of this blessing in the Amidah was an active step toward that clarity. It is the addition of this blessing as an emergency initiative that allows us to ask God to complete the process for us.

This is an important tool in service of God; we can ask God to complete a process for us if we take one active step toward achieving that goal. We can even use prayer as that first active step. If we understand that prayer is not, in this context, the pleading of a child, but rather an

active step toward achieving growth, we can use prayer to involve God enough to finish the process for us.

We should include a personal request for moral clarity in this paragraph. There are times when we do not know what is moral in a specific situation. There are times when it is difficult to know which the moral path to take is. We can pray for God's help in achieving that clarity.

It is important at this point to interject a fundamental aspect of Jewish thought: The Torah teaches, "And you shall do that which is just and good in the eyes of God."¹³ Nachmanidies asks why is it necessary to have such a general commandment when we already have 613 specific commandments governing each aspect of our lives. He explains that it is impossible for the Torah to list every situation that every human being will face over the course of history. This verse is teaching us that the observance of the commandments will train us to know what is just and good in the eyes of God even when it is not spelled out in black and white in the Torah. Nachmanidies is teaching us that we develop our sensitivity to God and His will by practicing the Mitzvot. We must understand that the Mitzvot nurture our souls by helping us develop a sixth sense for God's will.

Unfortunately, we are all too familiar with people who are observant and yet seem to have no morals. The Mitzvot are not nurturing them. We must be aware of this benefit of the commandments when we practice them. We must ask for God's help in allowing the Mitzvot to work as they should. Therefore, it is essential to remember this idea and integrate it into this blessing. When we pray for moral clarity we are also praying that the Mitzvot nurture us as they can.

At this point we have made the following requests:

- In the seventh section, we requested that God change the preordained cycle of events and bring the redemption in the seventh year without the destined wars. We pray that God reveal Himself as the Redeemer of Israel without suffering.

- In the eighth blessing, we asked for the ability to access the prepared salvation without waiting for the ordained year. We want God to reveal Himself as the One Who has prepared salvation.

- In the ninth blessing, we petitioned God to send the blessings of Messianic times even before the messiah comes. We appeal to God to reveal Himself as the One Who brings Messianic blessing to the world.

- In the tenth blessing, we asked that the Messiah be a culmination of a time of tremendous good fortune, not a result of war and suffering and not as a salvation from misery. We pray that God is revealed as the One Who gathers the exiles in a time of blessing.

- In the eleventh blessing, we ask that God empower us through the restoration of justice to influence the entire world and to be active participants in bringing the Messiah. We want God to be revealed as the One Who empowers us through the restoration of justice.

- In the twelfth blessing, we ask God to reveal Himself as the One Who grants us moral clarity through the destruction of evil influences.

Once again, although we have already studied this individual paragraph, I would like to analyze this blessing as part of the series of blessings dealing with the redemption process. The Talmud explains that the righteous will rise after the fall of the wicked. We do not only want the

destruction of evil with the moral clarity that follows we want a world of good. We desire a world in which we are influenced and inspired by the righteous. This will create a world that will merit redemption. In this blessing, we are asking God to nurture the power of good in the world so that the messiah will come because it is a world of good. We do not want the messiah to come because the world is so evil that God will send him to save humanity from itself¹⁴.

We now return to our blessing. It is clear that when we ask that God return to Jerusalem it is because we have affected that return. After we have perfected the world so that God will return to Jerusalem, we request that He restore his presence, meaning that He respond to what we have achieved and take it one step further. The building of Jerusalem will be a reflection of God's presence there. It will not be the building of Jerusalem as we have seen in our times. It will be a Jerusalem that reflects the presence of God, that inspires us to attach to Him, and allows us to understand in practical ways the impact of our actions on all of creation. God will then restore the throne of David, meaning that there will be a reflection of God as king in this world¹⁵.

This is a process that is in effect now. God is presently guiding the world to reach this point. We therefore conclude by asking God to reveal Himself as the Builder of Jerusalem.

¹TB Megillah 17b-18a

²The Jewish Agricultural cycle is fifty years. There are seven cycles of seven years followed by the Yovel, or Jubilee Year. The seventh year is called Shemittah. People may not work their land, all purchased land returns to the original owners and all debts are cancelled.

³Ramchal, Derech Hashem, Section 2 chapter 3

⁴ Isaiah I :25

⁵This is based on the Talmudic concept (Megillah 13b) that God creates the healing before He sends the illness.

⁶Maharal, Netivot Olam I, Netiv Ha'avodah, chapter 18. See also Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 183:3

⁷Ramchal ibid.

⁸TB Megillah 17b C.V. "and your fruits..."

⁹Maamar HaCochmah; Malchuyot, Zichronot and Shofarot

¹⁰Rabbi Moshe, the Count of Couey, 13th century; Sefer Mitzvot Gadol, Positive commandment 74

¹¹TB Megillah 17b C.V. "The deniers will be destroyed."

¹²TB Berachot 29a

¹³Deuteronomy 6:18

¹⁴This is based on the Talmudic saying, Sanhedrin 98a, that the Messiah will come either because we are righteous or because we fallen so deeply that he must come to save us.

¹⁵Based on TB Berachot 58a