



# *Emunah* in the Classroom

## דעו לפני מי אתם עומדים

A hands-on guide for teaching *Emunah* to elementary school-age children  
through *baur tefila*

by Rabbi Dovid Sapirman

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## The Akiva and Bila Medjuck Edition

### Feedback from Mechanchim who use this Kuntres

Dear Rabbi Sapirman, Shlita,

I would like to share with you a few words about what an impact your Tefilah Sefer has on the fourth grade class of Torah Academy of Boston.

**Every morning we spend about five minutes**, slowly but surely going through the meaning of our daily Davening based on your beautiful thoughts and insights. **The boys have responded by Davening with geshmak, and really getting a sense of the importance of what Davening means.** This will ImyH"m set the tone for a lifetime of Havanah and Chashivus of proper and meaningful Davening.

Sincerely,  
Rabbi Yonasan Rodkin  
Torah Academy Boston, 4th Grade

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Dear Rabbi Sapirman, Shlita

I am writing to thank you for the wonderful kuntres, דעו לפני מי אתם עומדים, **which I use every morning after Shachris** in Yeshiva Ketana Zichron Chaim U'Bina of Queens to help myself and my 86 talmidim from grades seven and eight have a deeper understanding of the tefilos we say every day. **It is incredible the impact these short, insightful comments have had over the past four years. Talmidim remember them, and more importantly they are inspired to ask questions and discuss tefila in a positive way.**

Thank you,

Rabbi Binyomin Kessler  
Menahel,  
Yeshiva Ketana Zichron Chaim U'bina of Queens

## דעו לפני מי אתם עומדים

מוקדש לעילוי נשמת:  
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הר"ר זכריה בן חיים ברוך זצ"ל

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**To the instructor:**

The booklet you now hold in your hands was created with two purposes in mind. The first and most obvious is to impart to the students a feeling for *davening* by making them aware of the basic content of each תפלה. By the time a student reaches adolescence, they will have spent a few thousand hours *davening*. If they have no clue of the meaning of *davening* in general, and, more specifically, the meaning of the individual תפלה, they may very well view the entire practice of תפלה as a meaningless, rote exercise, ח"ו. Instead of bringing them closer to הקדוש ברוך הוא, the experience may be pushing them further away from Him. With a proper grounding in תפלה, באור *davening* can become inspiring and meaningful to them. This is our ultimate goal in presenting this תפלה באור program.

The second purpose is to impart חזוק in אמונה through the *davening*. The אנשי כנסת הגדולה wove all the יסודות האמונה<sup>1</sup> into the תפלות. If the children will have a better idea of what they are saying, the אמונה thoughts in the תפלות will be repeated and internalized day after day. תפלה is actually an exercise for אמונה<sup>2</sup>. This is one of the main ways of instilling אמונה into our youth from the very earliest ages. Through the תפלות, they will hear concepts that they might not hear in any other context. By the time they have covered the main parts of *davening*, they will, hopefully, have absorbed a significant part of the השקפה they need to live their lives as ערליכע יידען.

Nothing could be more important than for a child to realize when he *davens* that **there is actually someone listening**. When he has become familiar with the content of the תפלות, he realizes that we are saying these things to the בורא עולם, and not just going through robotic motions day in and day out, תפלה after תפלה.

This guide was deliberately written in relatively simple language, to make it easy to transmit to the תלמידים. Originally, it was intended for elementary school מורות and רביים. However, it became quickly apparent that it can be a חזוק for older students, and even for adults, and especially useful at the *Shabbos* table. This program has been designed to take under five minutes a day. It is amazing how many meaningful thoughts can be imparted in less than five minutes. A תפלה or ברכה which has only a point or two can be done in a day. There is nothing lost if the teacher remains on a single point for a few days, until it is absorbed. On the other hand, a תפלה or ברכה which has many points can be done over the course of many days. There is no rush. The מורה or מלמד has the freedom to choose whichever points he/she considers most meaningful for their particular class. Other points not written here may, of course, be added. Some points may be too sophisticated for very young children, but suitable for junior high school level or older. The main idea is that the instructor has everything needed right at hand. It is most advantageous to make the lesson

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1. This can be found in אוצר התפלות, volume one, in a section immediately following the table of contents. It is called תולדות הסדור והתפתחותו. This short piece **is a must** for appreciation of *tefilah*.

2. When משה רבנו was *davening* during the war with עמלק, the פסוק says, "ויהי ידיו אמונה עד בא השמש". The תרגום translates this as, "והוה ידוהי פריסן בצלו עד מיצל שימשא". This means that משה's hands were stretched out in תפלה, which the תורה calls אמונה. These two, אמונה and תפלה are synonymous, because תפלה is the exercise for אמונה.

## דעו לפני מי אתם עומדים

as interactive as possible. Questioning the students on what they heard a day or two before will keep their interest up. After some time passes, it is a good idea to come back and review, as well as to test the students to see how much they have retained. I have personally given these *baur tefilah* lessons hands-on in a fourth grade, over the course of an entire school year. The results were excellent. A number of *mechanchim* in various schools are using the program, and are very enthusiastic about it.

Someone I know, who teaches seventh and eighth grades, has implemented such a program. He teaches in an excellent day school which caters to a rather modern crowd. He reports that his boys are *davening* like never before.

A five minute a day program adds up to well over eight hours per year. In the course of eight years of elementary school, that is more than sixty four hours. By the time a boy is ready for *ישיבה*, where the *davening* is usually quite long, he will be fortified with the meaning and the feeling of the *תפלות*. The same for a girl when she enters a *בית יעקב* type high school. High school students who never learned *באור תפלה* before can at last gain an appreciation for something previously viewed as boring and meaningless.

The main thrust of this program is that the *תלמידים* should know the basic content and meaning of each *תפלה*. Drilling them on the translations may prove boring to them, but the content can be presented in a manner which is interesting and exciting. Undoubtedly, when the teacher explains a particular *תפלה*, the translation should be read through once or twice. It is to be hoped that if the *תלמידים* become involved and interested in the *davening*, they will pay attention to the translation themselves. After all, as they progress through their *הינוך*, they will be amassing sufficient vocabulary to translate the majority of the *תפלות* on their own. Many *תלמידים* already *daven* from *סדורים* with translations, which can help considerably.

In the course of writing this short guide to *באור תפלה*, I found many new insights in various *תפלות*. If the reader is also similarly inspired, the gain is quite significant. In order to inspire our students in *תפלה*, we must be inspired ourselves. May the *רבנו של עולם* grant that all of us shall grow from this effort, both for ourselves and our *תלמידים*.

The Ani Maamin Foundations was created to spread the study of *emunah* and related subjects to the *עולם התורה*: parents, teachers and students alike. This *באור תפלה* guide is just one of our initiatives to bring *הזוהר* in a user friendly, hands on manner. Please feel free to contact us with any questions or other ways in which we can be of help.

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## ענין תפלה

- Every Jew has been given an amazing privilege: to communicate with the Creator of the universe. The idea of תפלה actually started with אדם הראשון. Although the plants were created on the third day of Creation, they remained just under the surface of the ground. One additional thing was needed for their completion: תפלה. When אדם was created on the sixth day, he realized that they needed rain to make them sprout. So he *davened* for rain to fall, and then they sprouted forth from the ground.<sup>3</sup>
- <sup>4</sup>The idea of מעריב מנחה שחרית originated with the אבות. Ever since we have been a nation, we have held on to תפלה as a national way of life. In good times and bad, we always turned to the רבונו של עולם, to thank Him and to ask Him for mercy.
- When the first בית המקדש was destroyed, most of the Jewish people were scattered in many different countries. Even after the second בית המקדש was built, most of the people were not living in ארץ ישראל. They needed something which would keep them together as one nation, even though they were far away from each other and from the בית המקדש. The סדור was put together by the אנשי כנסת הגדולה. They were the סנהדרין at the beginning of the בית שני. It is that very סדור which keeps all Jews unified. Three times every day, *Yidden* all over the world say the same exact תפלות, no matter where they live.<sup>5</sup>
- Not only do the תפלות unify all Jews, they also inspire us with all Jewish values. <sup>6</sup>The תפלות weave into the fabric of the תפלות all the principles of אמונה, the glorious history of the עם ישראל, and the miraculous destiny that awaits us. The תפלות very often mention יציאת מצרים, the מצות בכורות, and the קריעת ים סוף. The long awaited המשיח is mentioned frequently, along with עולם הבא and תחיית המתים. If we pay attention to what we are saying, we can live a life of real belief and trust in השם יתברך. People that keep מצוות but don't think about these things are robbed of the sweetness of what a תורה life really is. We have all of this waiting for us right here in the סידור.
- The תפלות that we say connect us with the *Yidden* of all past generations. *Yidden* said these תפלות in בבל, in France, Germany, Russia, Poland, Hungary, Morocco, and every other place where *Yidden* have wandered in the last 2400 years since the סדור was made. When we say the same תפלות that they always said, we are reminded that we come from a long line of *Yidden* that spent their lives serving הוא הקדוש ברוך הוא.
- השם יתברך does not need our praises. He knows what we need without our telling Him. He can even read our thoughts. Why, then, do we need to *daven*? When we *daven*, we come to realize the greatness of the Creator, and how dependent we are upon Him every

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3. רש"י פרשת בראשית פרק ב' פסוק ה'

4. ברכות כו:

5. See footnote # 1

6. See footnote # 1

second of our lives. As we *daven*, we come closer to השם יחברך, and thereby become more deserving that He should accept and answer our תפלות.

- The most important thing about *davening* is to remember that **there is someone listening**. Although the עולם של רבונו does not speak to us, He **is** listening to all our ברכות and תפלות.
- When the great *Tana* Rebbe Eliezer was about to die, his students came to visit him. They said to him, "Our teacher, teach us the ways of life by which we will merit to live in the after-life. He told them three things. One of them was, "When you are *davening*, know before Whom you stand". (Our booklet gets its' name from this statement). This is the essence of *davening*: to remember that you stand before *Hashem*, and He is listening to your *tefilos*.

### ברכות

- There are three main kinds of ברכות<sup>7</sup>. Some ברכות are a thank you to the Creator when we take pleasure from the world, such as food and drink. These are called ברכות הנהנין. A second category of ברכות is called ברכות המצוות. These are said before we do a מצוה, in gratitude to השם for making us special by giving us מצוות. A third type of ברכה is a praise to השם for the wonderful things He does for us, and a request for various things which we need.
- The only ברכות which the תורה itself commanded us to say are ברכת התורה and ברכת המזון. All the rest are מדרבנן. However<sup>8</sup>, the תורה itself commanded us to obey the חכמים. Every command of the רבנן is backed by the authority of the תורה.
- Every time we say the words ברוך אתה, we are reminded that we stand before השם at all times. That is how we can speak to השם directly and say "You".

### ברכות השחר

#### מודה אני

- Every night, we entrust our tired נשמה to הוא הקדוש ברוך הוא, and in the morning He returns it all refreshed and ready for another day. This is what ירמיהו הנביא meant when he said, "חדשים לבקרים רבה אמונתך"<sup>9</sup> (We are renewed every morning, because Your trustworthiness is so great).
- If someone who owes you money does work in your home and mistakenly leaves his tools there, you might be tempted to tell him that you won't return his tools until he pays you the money he owes you. We have lots of debts to הוא הקדוש ברוך הוא. Sometimes we fall

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7. רמב"ם הלכות ברכות פרק א' הל' א' - ד'

8. רבנו יונה שערי תשובה שער שלישי / רמב"ם ספר המצוות שרש א'

9. איכה ג'



short in serving Him properly, or perhaps we even עבירה do an חס ושלום. He could say, I am not giving you back your נשמה, because you haven't paid me what you owe me. He doesn't do so, and every morning we get our נשמה back.<sup>10</sup>!! רבה אמונתך

### ברוך אתה

- Every ברכה begins with the words ברוך אתה. We must remember that we are speaking directly to הקדוש ברוך הוא, and He is listening to what we are saying.

### אשר קדשנו במצותיו

- Whenever we say a ברכה for a מצוה, we are thanking השם for raising us up above the other nations, and making us a holy people by giving us his מצוות. Some people view doing מצוות like paying taxes. It is something they have to do, and when they are done they can get on with their lives. Every time we say אשר קדשנו במצוותיו we declare that the מצוות are a privilege, not a burden.

### על נטילת ידים

- ראשונים offer two reasons for the מצוה of washing in the morning<sup>11</sup>. The first is that we have no control over our hands at night, and they may have touched unclean places on the body. Therefore חז"ל instituted this מצוה as a preparation for קריאת שמע and תפלה. Another reason is that every morning we are like a new creation. All night long our נשמות were deposited with השם יתברך and he returns them refreshed to us in the morning, just as he blew the נשמה into אדם הראשון at the time of creation. We want to dedicate ourselves to serving our Creator. So we prepare for our *davening* and our service to השם in the same way that the כהן did in the המקדש. Just as he washed his hands from the כיוור, so do we wash our hands with a כלי.

- This מצוה is a מצוה דרבנן. It was instituted<sup>12</sup> by שלמה המלך and his בית דין. Nevertheless, we say אשר קדשנו במצותיו וצונו because the תורה gave the חכמים the authority to make laws for us, and commanded us to listen to them. So, although there is no specific command in the תורה to wash נטילת ידים, we are commanded by השם to do it, since He told us to obey the חכמים.

### אשר יצר

- Every time we use the bathroom, we are obligated to say the ברכה of יצר אשר יצר.

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10. מפירוש עץ יוסף באוצר התפלות בשם יערות דבש

11. מחלוקת הרשב"א והרא"ש הובא במשנה ברורה סימן ד' ס"ק א'

12. עירובין כא:

## דעו לפני מי אתם עומדים

- We tend to take anything we are used to for granted. We fail to appreciate them. However, many great miracles are taking place in your body just to enable you to eat, digest your food, and get rid of the wastes when you go to the washroom.
- The miracle starts even before you begin eating. The saliva in your mouth is already waiting for the food you will eat. It begins to break down (digest) the food so that the body will be able to use it.
- In the stomach, there are one million glands that produce acid, which makes the food useable for the body.
- Acid burns, but it does not harm your stomach, because there is a special lining in the stomach which the acid can not harm. The material that this lining is made out of is not found anywhere else in your body, only in the stomach where it is needed.

מה רבו מעשיך ד'!

- Many other machines in your body have a share in digesting your food, taking out the parts that the body needs for its' nourishment, and pushing out the parts that are not needed or harmful.
- From the ברכה of אשר יצר we should remind ourselves of all the other miracles at work in the human body: the heart, the lungs, the bloodstream, the nervous system, bones, muscles and endless other things too numerous to list.

## אלקי נשמה

- A person is a combination of a גוף and a נשמה. Whereas the ברכה of אשר יצר is a thank you for the marvelous creation and workings of the human body, this ברכה is a thank you for the spiritual part of the human being, the נשמה.
- The גוף is not the real you. It is merely your clothing<sup>13</sup>. The body is the clothing of the נשמה, and the נשמה is the real you.
- The נשמה existed before you were born, was brought down from the world of נשמות, and placed in your body at the time of birth.
- The נשמה will live on after a person leaves this world. Death can be compared to a person taking off his jacket. The person is still the same.<sup>14</sup>
- The נשמה lives on *forever* in the עולם הנשמות. This is what the פסוק in בראשית means when it says ויפה באפיו נשמת חיים, a soul of *eternal* life.
- Sometime in the future, השם יתברך is going to put the נשמות of the צדיקים back into some kind of a body. This will be an even greater reward than being in גן עדן. This is called תחיית המתים.

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13. כמאמר הכתוב (איוב י') עור ובשר תלבישני וגידים ועצמות תסוככני.

14. A tragic story will illustrate this point. The grandson of an אדם גדול was killed in an accident. His brother was hysterical. The grandfather calmed him by saying, "It's only a jacket. The נשמה still lives on".

## דעו לפני מי אתם עומדים

- There are thirteen main ideas that every Jew must believe in. These are called י"ג עקררים, and are found in the list of אני מאמין in the סדור after תפלת שחרית. The belief in תחיית המתים is the last of the thirteen principles.
- The body was given to us to make it possible for the soul to fulfill the מצוות, which require us to have a body. The soul is the real you, and your body is a tool.
- Therefore we say in this ברכה that as long as this נשמה is inside us, we promise to keep thanking השם for creating us.

## לעסוק בדברי תורה

- The מצוה of learning תורה is very, very great. It is considered equal to all the rest of the מצוות put together. That is why the ברייתא says "תלמוד תורה כנגד כולם".
- The תורה is like a letter from השם יתברך to all His people ישראל together, and to each and every person individually. It contains His instructions for us about how to live a successful life in this world, and merit our reward in עולם הבא.
- We ask השם to make the תורה sweet in our mouths. תורה is naturally sweet, as דוד המלך calls it in תהלים, "sweeter than honey and honey combs". Why must we ask Him to make it sweet for us if it is already sweet? The answer is: chocolate is sweet too, but if it is eaten right after eating an onion it will not taste so good. We ask השם to help us avoid doing, seeing and thinking the things which will make the תורה seem not so sweet. If we fill our heads with the wrong things, we can lose our appetite for sweet *Torah*.
- We ask השם to grant that our children and grandchildren should be יודעי שמך and לומדי תורה. What does יודעי שמך have to do with the ברכה about learning תורה? When we learn תורה properly, we remember that it is His word, His instructions to us. It makes it possible for us to connect with Him, know Him, and understand Him as much as is possible for a person of flesh and blood.
- For more than 3300 years, כלל ישראל has made it their number one priority to give over the תורה which we received from סיני to our children. For this reason, in the same ברכה that we thank השם for the מצוה of learning, we *daven* that our children shall continue learning and being עובדי השם as well.
- <sup>15</sup>The very first school system in the world was founded about 2200 years ago, by the יהושע בן גמלא named כהן גדול, under the supervision of שמעון בן שטח. Until that time, every father used to teach his own son תורה. However, there were many children who didn't have fathers. After trying a few different plans, those חכמים decreed that every town must have a מלמד who will teach the children תורה, starting from around age six years old. Every one needed to pay for the support of this system, even people who had no children,

<sup>16</sup>because the world exists through the learning of תינוקות של בית רבן. Young children have no sins, and their תורה learning is therefore very pure. That זכות is what keeps the world going.

### אשר בחר בנו

- The גמרא calls this ברכה the very finest of all the ברכות<sup>17</sup>. As רש"י explains, it contains a thank you to הקדוש ברוך הוא, and a praise of the תורה and ישראל. It is indeed a great compliment to us that we were chosen to receive תורה's השם יתברך.
- <sup>18</sup>Throughout the חומש and the תנ"ך we see that the Jewish people are השם's chosen ones. Some people don't like this idea, that we think we are better than everyone else. On second thought, however, this makes perfect sense, as we will now explain.
- When השם wanted to give the תורה, no one wanted to accept it except for the עם ישראל. It was too hard for them to be bothered with. Each nation asked what the תורה says. When they were told, they answered that the sacrifice was too hard for them. We said "נעשה". As a result, the other nations are only obligated to keep the מצוות בני נח, but we, who did accept the תורה, have six hundred and thirteen מצוות. Obviously, if we spend our lives serving השם and others do not, it isn't surprising that השם favors us.
- Any non-Jew who wants to join and become a member of the עם הנבחר has the chance to do so. They can be מגייר. What is the price of entering the favored nation? Do we collect a large application fee? Do we demand that they accept on themselves extra strict rules? No! All they have to do is וקבלת מצוות, טבילה, מילה, the exact same price that we paid when we accepted the תורה over three thousand years ago. In the course of that time, rivers of our blood have been spilt, and oceans of tears shed throughout our long and bitter גלות. We still let them join, and the price has not seen any inflation. It couldn't be more fair than that, and we are certainly not racists by any stretch of the imagination.
- גרים can rise to the highest heights among us. Jewish history is full of גרים who became leaders, prophets and teachers. The list is very long, but just to mention a few: יתרו, רות, שאנו נקראים "סגלה" שמות פרק יט פסוק ה' ועוד כמה מקומות. Both רבי מאיר and רבי עקיבא came from גרים. עובדיה הנביא, שמעיה, אבטליון, הגר צדק מווילנא. The תורה reminds us in thirty six places to treat the גר as an equal.<sup>19</sup> No nation in the world is prepared to welcome strangers the way that עם ישראל does. All we ask of them is that they be sincere in their desire to accept *Yiddishkeit*.

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16. שבת קיט:

17. ברכות יא:

18. שאנו נקראים "סגלה" שמות פרק יט פסוק ה' ועוד כמה מקומות  
שאנו העם הנבחר דברים פרק ז' פסוק ו' ועוד כמה מקומות

19. בל"ו מקומות הזהירה תורה על אונאת הגר (בבא מציעא נט:)

## אשר נתן לשכוי

This ברכה is a thank you to the Creator for giving us intelligence to understand the world around us. First thing in the morning, we mention the wisdom He has given us to tell the difference between night and day. We should not take this for granted. The human mind is an extremely complicated machine. Without the awesome capacity of the mind to understand things, we could not function as human beings, and there would be no purpose for our existence in this world.

The word "שכוי" in לשון הקודש can mean one of two things. It can mean a rooster, but it can also mean the heart. Once upon a time people did not have alarm clocks. They used to get up in the morning when they would hear the rooster crow. When we hear the rooster, and we realize that this understanding has been given to it by the בורא עולם, we remind ourselves of our own שכל, given to us by 'השם ית'.

## שלא עשני גוי

- This ברכה is not meant to put גוים down. Nor are the next two ברכות meant to put down slaves or women. We merely mean to thank השם יתברך for the additional מצוות we have that a non-Jew, a slave and a woman do not have.
- The reward for a מצוה is forever and ever. When the ווילנא גאון זצ"ל was about to die, his מבקר חולה came to be תלמידים. They saw that he was crying. They asked him, רבינו, why do you cry? You know what amazing שכר awaits you in עולם הבא for all the תורה that you learned and taught, and all the מצוות you performed." The גאון fondled his ציצית and said, "In this world, you can buy ציצית for a little money, and השם will reward you forever for wearing them. The moment a person leaves this world, there are no more opportunities to earn more שכר. For this I cry". That is how precious a מצוה is!
- There is a מחלוקת between תנאים<sup>20</sup> if a blind man is obligated to perform מצוות. The גמרא tells us the story<sup>21</sup> of רב יוסף, an אמורא who was blind. At first he thought that a person who is not obligated to do the מצוות, but still does them voluntarily, is more deserving of reward than a person who *must* fulfill the מצוות. He said that if anyone could demonstrate that a blind man is פטור from מצוות, he would throw a party to celebrate, because he keeps all the מצוות even though he is blind. Later on, when he was taught that a person who is commanded receives more שכר, he said just the opposite. If anyone could demonstrate that a blind man is חיב in all the מצוות he would make a יום טוב for all the רבנן. This is the reason that a סעודה is made<sup>22</sup> when a boy becomes בר מצוה. He celebrates becoming חיב in the מצוות. Therefore, we make special ברכות to thank השם for giving us all these מצוות.

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20. בבא קמא פו.

21. בבא קמא פז.

22. ים של שלמה בבא קמא פרק ז' סימן ל"ז

### פוקח עורים

- There is no camera in the world as complex as the human eye. Millions of nerve endings in the retina are connected to the brain, which interprets the message. The eyes are the camera, but really we are seeing with our brain. When we wake up in the morning and open our eyes, we should feel a deep הכרת הטוב for the ability to see. If we needed to, we would give away everything we possess to avoid losing the ability of sight, and now we have it all for free.

### מלביש ערומים

- Although our clothes are man made, we thank הקדוש ברוך הוא for creating the raw materials from which we make these clothes: wool, flax (linen), cotton, etc. We also remember that it is השם יתברך Who has given us the wisdom to produce these articles of clothing, and the money with which to buy them.
- Animals have not been given the instincts to make clothes because they don't need them. Each one has the fur, hair, skin or feathers that protect their bodies in their environment. Mankind, however, needs clothes to keep him warm, and also for צניעות. So this ברכה is a thank you for something we simply take for granted.
- Clothes serve an even more important purpose, however. They give a human being a sense of dignity. A person is not just a smart animal. He was created בצלם אלקים and must wear clothing which that will reinforce that sense of dignity. <sup>23</sup>Indeed, the גמרא tells us that ר' אלעזר call clothing מכבודא, the honor or dignity of a person. That is why we say that השם clothes the "undressed", to stress that without our clothes we would be naked like the animals are.

### מתיר אסורים

- We hardly ever think about this great gift that השם has bestowed on us: the ability to stretch and move our limbs. Forty muscles have to work together in unison just to produce a smile. When we want to raise our hand, signals from the brain causes certain muscles to contract and thus lift our hand. These are highly complex processes. Without this ability we would literally be אסורים, which means tied up.

### זוקף כפופים

- The spine is a wondrous machine made of thirty three separate bones. These bones are not all connected, but rather spaced with cartilage in between so that we will have the maximum flexibility. All too often we take this great gift for granted. Only man, from all the animals, walks בקומה זקופה, upright. Even apes, which do stand straight, walk on all

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<sup>23</sup>. שבת קיג.

fours. This is the dignity of a human over the animals, to stand upright in the presence of השם.

### רוקע הארץ על המים

• At the beginning of מעשה בראשית, water covered the entire surface of the earth. On the third day, השם said, "Let the waters all be collected in one place, and let the dry land be seen".<sup>24</sup>The waves may be very very high, but when they come to the shore, they break, and don't flood the continents. Sometimes, when השם wants to punish the world, he lets the waves continue on to the dry land, such as in the case of a tsunami. That is what happened in the days of אנוש, that the ocean rose up and flooded a third of the world.<sup>25</sup> So when we place our feet on the ground, we have to remember that it is הסדי השם that the world is not flooded by the oceans.

### המכין מצעדי גבר

• The ability to walk is one more thing that we just take for granted. Every part of the human body demonstrates the infinite wisdom of השם. The feet are a very small base on which to support such a large body. Because of the special shape of the heel, the toes and the balls under the feet we are able to balance ourselves and not tip over. Indeed a great gift from the רבנו של עולם !

### שעשה לי כל צרכי

• Walking would be much harder if we didn't have shoes to cover our feet. We could easily cut ourselves by stepping on rocks or other sharp objects on the ground. We wouldn't walk in certain places because we might get hurt. We must remind ourselves that everything we have is from השם.

### אזור ישראל בגבורה

• An אזור is a belt or a "gartel". When we tighten our belt, we are better able to perform the tasks we need to do, and that is the גבורה, the strength we are referring to here. However, the belt serves a much more important purpose for us. It separates the top half of the body, which contains the heart and the mind, from the bottom half. It is required that we have this separation when we *daven*.<sup>26</sup>That is why we mention ישראל in this blessing, because only the Jewish people are concerned about this separation. Some people wear an extra belt, a "gartel", which they use only for *davening*.

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<sup>24</sup>. ירמיהו פרק ה' פסוק כב "אם מפני לא תחילו אשר שמתי חול גבול לים חק עולם ולא יעברנהו"

<sup>25</sup>. רש"י בראשית פרק ו' פסוק ד' ד"ה וגם אחרי כן

<sup>26</sup>. עיין משנה ברורה סימן מ"ו ס"ק ט'

### עוטר ישראל בתפארה

- This ברכה is said about our head covering.<sup>27</sup> Wearing something on our head reminds us always that there is Someone above us. From when a boy is young, he is trained to keep his head covered. In this ברכה, too, we specify ישראל, because only the Jewish people are concerned about keeping their heads covered. This is a crown of glory and a great sense of pride for us.

### הנותן ליעף כח

- As we mentioned above, it is a great חסד from Hashem that the body has the ability to re-energize after a night's sleep. Anyone who misses a night's sleep knows that it is very difficult to function successfully the next day. This is one of the many things that we take for granted, but need to train ourselves to appreciate.

### המעביר שנה מעיני ותנומה מעפעפי

- Even after a good night's sleep, we can still be groggy for a while. We thank השם for enabling us to fully wake up from our sleep, and removing the tiredness from our eyes. But we want to make sure that we wake up to useful, productive lives. Many people waste their days and their lives. Therefore, we ask השם to guide us through the day productively, to help us learn תורה and do מצוות. We also ask that we not be tested or shamed, and that we should be able to have the self control not to give in to the יצר הרע.
- We close off this ברכה by thanking השם for the many kindnesses that He does for us constantly: הגומל חסדים טובים לעמו ישראל.

### קרבות

- There is a way to replace the *korbanos* when we can not actually bring them. The *n'vi'im* taught us that when we can not bring *korbanos*, *davening* is a replacement for them. Our *davening* is considered as if we had actually brought *korbanos*.
- Each of the three *tefilos* that we say every day corresponds to a *korban* that we used to bring when the *Bais Hamikdash* was standing. Every morning and afternoon we would bring a קרבן תמיד. *Shacharis* and *mincha* are somewhat of a replacement for them. Although no *korbanos* were brought in the *Bais Hamikdash* at night, the *kohanim* could burn the parts of that day's *korbanos* which had not yet been burned on the *mizbeach*. *Ma'ariv* corresponds to that activity.

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<sup>27</sup> שבת קנו: "דאימיה דרבי נחמן בר יצחק אמרי לה כלדאי: בריך גנבא הוה. לא שבקתיה גליויי רישיה. אמרה ליה: כסי רישך, כי היכי דתיהוי עלך אימתא דשמיא"



## דעו לפני מי אתם עומדים

- Reading the *parshiyos* of the *korbanos*, and learning about their laws, is also considered as if we had actually brought *korbanos*.<sup>28</sup>
- For these reasons, in many *shuls*, sections from the *Torah* about קרבנות are recited before beginning פסוקי דזמרה.

## פסוקי דזמרה

- The main part of *davening* begins after ברכו. However, the section of *p'sukei d'zimrah* is for the purpose of putting us in a mood of *simcha shel mitzva*, and a serious frame of mind, before we begin communicating with our Creator.<sup>29</sup>
- Dovid Hamelech composed the book of תהלים. *Dovid Hamelech* used to speak to *Hashem* all the time, with words of praise and thanks. He would describe *Hashem's* greatness, and what a privilege it is to communicate with Him. These psalms were his expression of love and devotion to Hashem. In them, he states time and time again how dependent a person is on Hashem for everything in his life. Most of the *p'sukei d'zimrah* are taken from *Tehilim* and from words that *Dovid* said in *Divrei Hayamim*..
- The *n'vi'im* commanded the *Levi'im* to sing the words of תהלים when they bring the *korbanos* in the *Bais Hamikdash*. We were also commanded to say the הלל from תהלים on special occasions.
- Just as we recite a *bracha* before and after eating food, so, too, do we do with *p'sukei d'zimrah*. The *bracha* before is ברוך שאמר and the *bracha* after is ישתבח.
- An entire book could surely be written to explain each *pasuk* in *p'sukei d'zimrah*. We can not do that, but we will try to summarize a few parts, and explain a verse or two in each.

## ברוך שאמר

- We have a *mesorah* that this *bracha* fell down in a note from heaven to the *Anshei K'neses Hag'dolah*<sup>30</sup>. How inspiring to realize that we are saying a *tefilah* authored in Heaven.
- In this *bracha*, we thank *Hashem* for His creating and sustaining the world, and His infinite mercy upon his creatures. He rewards and punishes, and everything is totally fair. That is what we have in mind when we praise Him with *p'sukei d'zimrah*.
- Sometimes we see good people suffering and wicked people prospering. The *Torah* tells us that sometimes a *tzadik* gets his punishment in this world so that he comes totally cleansed to *Olam Haba*, and sometimes a *rasha* gets his reward in this world for some

28. מנחות קי. אמר רבי יצחק מאי דכתיב: (ויקרא ו') זאת תורת החטאת וזאת תורת האשם? כל העוסק בתורת חטאת כאילו הקריב חטאת, וכל העוסק בתורת אשם כאילו הקריב אשם.

29. תוספות ברכות לא.

30. הובא במשנה ברורה או"ח סימן נא ס"ק א'

## דעו לפני מי אתם עומדים

small *mitzva* he did. That is why we add "ברוך חי לעד וקיים לנצח". *Hashem* is eternal and has plenty of time to pay all his debts to both the *tzadikim* and the *reshaim*.

- *Hashem* created the world effortlessly. Just by his word alone it all came into being. Everything in the world was originally created during the ששת ימי בראשית. That is what we mean by ברוך אומר ועושה.

- As we said, most of *p'sukei d'zimrah* come from תהלים. That is why we say here that we praise Hashem with the songs of *Dovid*, His servant.

## מזמור לתודה

- When the *Bais Hamikdash* was standing, a person who survived a difficult experience needed to bring a קרבן תודה. If someone had been sick, taken a journey overseas or through the desert, or been released from imprisonment, he would have needed to bring this *korban*. Although we can never repay *Hashem* for His kindness to us, the least we can do is express our gratitude. The truth is though, that all of us experience miracles daily, although we may not even be aware of them. Perhaps a car was headed toward us and turned away just in time. Perhaps there was something slippery on the ground and we stepped over it. *Hashem* is constantly taking care of us, even in situations we don't notice. Therefore we say מזמור לתודה every day, to thank Him for all His constant supervision.<sup>31</sup>

## עבדו את ד' בשמחה

- We don't perform *mitzvos* as if they are a burden or an obligation. It is actually a great privilege to be able to speak to *Hashem* in prayer, study His *Torah*, and keep his *mitzvos*. If sometimes we think it is a burden, it is because we don't yet have the maturity to appreciate this great favor. In this *pasuk*, *Dovid Hamelech* tells us to "serve *Hashem* with happiness, and come before Him with rejoicing."

## אשרי

- *Chazal* tell us that whoever says תהלה לדוד three times every day is assured to be a בן עולם הבא. Of course, this is only true if we think about what we are saying,<sup>32</sup> because thinking about *Hashem's* wonders and how wonderful it is to serve him will surely strengthen out *emunah*.

- From תהלה לדוד until the end of the fifth הללו-קה are the last six sections of the book of *Tehilim*. They are the main part of *p'sukei d'zimrah*.

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31. ספר עלת תמיד פרק יז  
32. רד"ק

## דעו לפני מי אתם עומדים

- The two *pesukim* we recite before תהלה לדוד are not part of the same מזמור. Each one comes from a different part of *Tehilim*.
- *Dovid Hamelech* had a passionate relationship with *Hashem*. He thought about Him constantly, and always sang His praises. That is how he spent his time while he was a shepherd. Alone in the pasture, he connected with *Hashem*. Here, in this mizmor, he describes how wonderful it is to speak about *Hashem*, appreciate His goodness and kindness, and teach others about Him.

### פותח את ידך

- There is one verse that must be said with *kavana*, or else it must be repeated. That is the verse פותח את ידך ומשביע לכל חי רצון. *Hashem* opens His hand and gives food to every living creature on earth. We are constantly benefiting from His kindness, and must never take it for granted.
- It is amazing to realize that every single creature on earth has something to eat. There is a food chain which stretches from the smallest to the biggest, and all of this was created for the benefit of mankind.

### הללו-קה / הללי נפשי את ד'

- In this *mizmor*, *Dovid Hamelech* says that a person should not put his trust in anyone but *Hashem*, who is *Almighty*. It is He who created the world and controls it, and supervises and takes care of even the weakest. The power and influence of mighty people is only temporary, and, at best, last only till the moment of their death, which is inevitable. *Hashem Yisborach* is eternal and all-powerful

### הללו-קה / הללו את ד' מן השמים

- Although we can not hear their שירה, everything in Creation praises *Hashem* and recognizes His control over the universe.

## ברכות לפני קריאת שמע

- The תורה commanded us to recite שמע ישראל twice every day: once in the morning and once at night.
- The שמע is not a prayer, it is a declaration of loyalty to השם and His תורה. It is as if we are saying, "I promise you, השם, that I will keep everything you have commanded".
- The סדור was authored by the אנשי כנסת הגדולה. They were the סנהדרין at the very beginning of the שני בית, under the leadership of עזרא הסופר. Among them were one hundred and twenty זקנים, many of whom were still נביאים. They are the ones who

prescribed most of the ברכות and תפלות that we say. They gave us seven ברכות to say before and after the קריאת שמע, three in the morning and four at night.

- These ברכות are not a ברכת המצוה on the מצוה of שמע like the ברכה that we say before putting on ציצית or תפילין. Rather, these ברכות are a praise and a request to השם, each one with its own subject.
- The ברכות before the שמע in the morning discuss two subjects we need to think about before we recite the שמע. The first is that הוא הקדוש ברוך הוא is the Creator of everything, and is in total control of the entire universe. The second is that He gave us a תורה, not to be a burden, but rather because He loves us. These are the subjects of these two ברכות.

### יוצר אור ובורא הושך

- Every morning, we wake up to see the sun shining brilliantly in the sky. When we went to sleep it was dark, and colder than in the daytime. Now it is bright and warm. We are supposed to be inspired to think about the Creator when we see this. That is why the first ברכה before the שמע is about the creation of "the lights".
- If the sun were any closer to the earth than it is, everything on earth would get burnt up. If it were any further away, it would be too cold on earth for us to live. It is just the right distance away, because it was created with us in mind.
- It's not only the lights that this ברכה discusses. We say, "כולם בחכמה עשית", "מה רבו מעשיך ד' כולם בחכמה עשית", "How great are your deeds, השם, You made all of them with Your wisdom. The world is full of Your possessions." Seeing the sun renewed every morning reminds us that **the entire world** is השם's creation, maintained and guided by Him.
- The מלאכים in heaven sing praises to השם regularly. This ברכה describes the שירת המלאכים in great detail. This is the longest ברכה in the סדור.
- The wisdom in the lights, (the sun, moon and stars) is infinite. The מלאכים never tire of praising the בורא for creating them, setting them in motion and keeping them constantly functioning. That is why this ברכה about the lights describes the praises of the מלאכים to השם.
- <sup>33</sup>There were two נביאים that were shown what happens in Heaven when the מלאכים sing שירה to שירה הוא הקדוש ברוך הוא. They were ישעיהו and יחזקאל. While ישעיהו lived in ירושלים during the time of the first המקדש בית המקדש, the visions of יחזקאל were shown to him while he was already in exile in בבל, just shortly before the first המקדש בית המקדש was destroyed.
- קדוש קדוש heard the מלאכים call to one another and praise השם in unison. They said קדוש קדוש. This means that השם is holy in heaven (which is his dwelling place), on the earth where we can see His awesome deeds, and holy forever and ever.

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33. ישעיהו פרק ו' / יחזקאל פרק א' / ועיין חגיגה י"ג:

## דעו לפני מי אתם עומדים

- heard the מלאכים saying ד' ממקומו ברוך כבוד ד'. This means that we can not really understand very much about השם, for He is beyond our grasp to really comprehend.
- These two sections are both הפטרות. The הפטרה of ישעיהו of נבואה, and פרשת יתרו of הפטרה, and the הפטרה of יחזקאל is the הפטרה of the first day of שבועות. Both of these sections are called by the name מעשה המרכבה.
- We, of course, are not מלאכים. We can not duplicate their excitement over the wonders that הקדוש ברוך הוא has put into the lights and into all of nature. However, when we think of the מלאכים, we should be reminded that we, too, should think about these things and become inspired as much as human beings can be.

## אהבה רבה - אהבת עולם

- In this ברכה, we plead with השם to have pity on us and give us the opportunity to learn His תורה.
- <sup>34</sup>In משלי it says: כי נר מצוה ותורה אור. A מצוה is a נר, but תורה is the fire. In תנ"ך, a נר means a cup in which you place the oil and the wick. All of the מצוות are compared to the cup that holds the oil, but the תורה learning that we do is the fire that ignites them.
- This is why we first ask for ללמוד וללמד, and only after that for לשמור ולעשות<sup>35</sup>. This follows what חז"ל teach us: גדול תלמוד שהתלמוד מביא לידי מעשה: *Torah* learning brings us to doing the *mitzvos*.
- All over the Jewish world, people are learning תורה. Some people learn full time, such as in a *Kollel*. Others can only learn part time, for they must earn a living to support their families. Perhaps they get up early in the morning and go to a שיעור or to learn with a חברותא. Others may have a סדר at night, when they finish their day's work. They have no other reason to do this but that they love the תורה. Other nations also have a set of laws, להבדיל. Did anyone ever see a group of people get together to study US or Canadian law (unless they are law students)? Only כלל ישראל does this. It is precisely this love of תורה which has kept us as a nation and enabled us to survive throughout this long and bitter גלות.

## קריאת שמע

- Reciting the שמע morning and evening is a מצוה דאורייתא. There are three פרשיות which we say, each one from a different place in the חומש. The פרשיות are: שמע, והיה אם שמוע, and ויאמר. Each פרשה imparts a different message to us.
- call the first פרשה of שמע by the name עול מלכות שמים "accepting the **yoke** of the kingdom of Heaven". What is a yoke? In ancient times, people did not have machines

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34. משלי פרק ו' פסוק כ"ג  
35. קידושין מ:

to work the fields. They used oxen for plowing and many other jobs. How did they make the ox go where they wanted it to? They put a wooden yoke over its neck which had straps tied to it. When the owner wanted to go to the right, he would pull on the right strap and the ox's head would turn right. Then the ox would walk in that direction. When the owner wanted to go to the left, he would pull on the left strap. If he wanted it to go straight, he would pull on both straps together. The yoke is the symbol of accepting authority from someone else and going where that authority wants you to go.

- Therefore we call the first section the פרשה of קבלת עול מלכות שמים. When we say it, we are promising to accept השם's authority and direction, and do whatever He tells us to do.<sup>36</sup>
- The second פרשה is called קבלת עול מצוות. When saying it, we think about the idea that השם has given us His instructions for life in the 613 מצוות of the תורה. We accept also the "yoke of מצוות".

### קריאת שמע

#### שמע ישראל

- The belief that השם is One is the second of the thirteen *ikrei emunah*.
- In the first פסוק we find two different names of השם. These names describe different ways in which השם conducts the world.
- The name that we don't pronounce as it is written is called the שם המיוחד, the special name. It refers to the Creator's mercy in dealing with the world. (That is מדת הרחמים). The name אלקים (in this verse אלקינו) describes the way in which He judges the world, punishes and rewards. (That is מדת הדין).
- The ancient peoples believed in many gods. They thought that there was one god for bad and a separate god for evil. We declare in this פסוק that **everything** comes directly from השם, for He controls everything that happens in the world.
- The ו and the ל are written extra large in the ספר תורה. These two letter spell the word עד, a witness. The כלל ישראל are the witnesses to the oneness of השם and testify to it twice each day. Throughout all the generations, it has been the Jewish people who have declared to the world that השם is One.
- When saying the word אחד, we should think to ourselves that השם is א One, on ה earth and in all seven levels of Heaven, and ל in all four directions: East, West, North, and South.

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In the book of דניאל we are told an amazing story. When נבוכדנצר conquered ירושלים, he took captives from the boys in the royal palace. Four of these boys were דניאל חנניה מישאל ועזריה. When they got to the palace, דניאל made up his mind that they would never eat the non-kosher foods of נבוכדנצר's palace. They convinced the waiter to take away their food portions and give them only seeds to eat and water to drink. These boys were just over bar-mitzvah age. רבנו סעדיה גאון explains that דניאל decided this as he was being מקבל עול מלכות שמים during קריאת שמע.

## דעו לפני מי אתם עומדים

- Since the תורה commands us to say קריאת שמע "When you get up", we must recite the שמע before one quarter of the day has past. We call this זמן קריאת שמע.

### ברוך שם כבוד מלכותו לעולם ועד

- These words of praise do not appear in the תורה, but הז"ל tell us that they were said by פטירה just before his פטירה. When his sons gathered around him, he was concerned that maybe one of them might not be complete in his אמונה. They said to him, "Listen ישראל (our father), השם is One in our hearts, just as he is in yours." He responded by saying ברוך שם כבוד מלכותו לעולם ועד.
- This phrase is also the שירת המלאכים. All year round we say it silently, because it is not written explicitly in the תורה, as is the rest of the שמע. However, on יום כפור we say it out loud, just as the מלאכים do.

### ואהבת

- This is one of the 613 מצוות, to love השם יתברך. The רמב"ם tells us that there are two ways to come to love השם. One is by looking at nature and seeing the awesome wisdom of השם, which has no limit. The other is through learning תורה, which is the infinite wisdom of השם. Perhaps for this reason we say these two ברכות of יוצר אור and אהבה רבה before שמע. One is a thank you and a praise for nature, and the other is a plea to השם to help us learn תורה. After we think about these two things, then we can accept upon ourselves the מצוה to love השם.

### בכל נפשך

- Although we are called upon constantly to make sacrifices for the service of השם, most of the time the sacrifices are relatively small. For example, when we have to resist a temptation for something forbidden, or exert ourselves to perform a מצוה. Less frequently, we are required to do something harder than the everyday מצוות that we keep, but there are some situations where we even have to give up our lives rather than to break the תורה.
- If we should be attacked by a non-Jew who threatens us to do an עבירה (to show that we give up our faith in השם) or else be killed, the general rule is that we should do the עבירה rather than die. The תורה says "והי בהם", which means ולא שימות בהם. We should not die in order to avoid an עבירה. However, there are cases where we must let ourselves be killed rather than to transgress the sin. If this is in public before ten Jews, if the government is trying to force us to convert, or if it is one the three sins of זרה, גילוי עריות ושפיכות דמים we would have to allow ourselves to be killed. This is called קדוש השם. That is what the תורה means by loving השם with כל נפשך, with all your life; even if you have to give your life.

## דעו לפני מי אתם עומדים

- Hundreds of thousands of *Yidden* were faced with this type of situation during the three thousand years (plus) since we became a nation. The Greeks, the Romans, and later the Christians and the Moslems all tried to force us to accept their religions in various historical periods. Almost always, the Jews said NO!
- When we say these words we should picture ourselves tied to the stake, with a fire about to be lit under our feet, or held at gunpoint. As we imagine them asking us if we will give up *Yiddishkeit* for some other religion, we shout NO! Light the fire! Shoot!
- קדוש השם is a very great מצוה. Whatever the person gives up in this world is made up to him in the world to come. When the חפץ היים זצ"ל was old, he could not go to the *yeshiva* to *daven*. There was a regular מנין in his home. People heard him *davening* and saying, "Please, קדוש השם, take my life for קדוש השם. Let me die for קדוש השם!"

## ובכל מאדך

- Sometimes we need to give up something other than our lives. Imagine that in order to avoid doing an עברה you would have to give away all your money. If your boss insists that you do work for him on שבת and if not he will fire you, the הלכה requires you to forfeit your job. This is what is meant by בכל מאדך, with all your money. So when we say these words, we think about this and make up our minds that if we are called upon to do this, we will. (השם יתברך is running the world. If He wants to reimburse us, He can certainly do so). If we promise to do it when called upon, we are accredited with the מצוה even if we didn't actually perform it.
- When *Yidden* first came to America from Europe over a hundred years ago, this was the type of נסיון (test) they faced. In those days, all businesses were open six days a week, including שבת. Most of those *Yidden* were very poor, and were really struggling to support themselves. They took jobs in factories where they were required to work on שבת. If they refused, they would be fired. Many, many *Yidden* felt that they had no choice. They went to a very early מנין on שבת morning, made קידוש, and then sadly went to work. Most of the children of such people remained מהללי שבת all their lives, and eventually left *Yiddishkeit* altogether.
- There were some people, however, who adamantly refused to break the שבת, no matter what sacrifice they had to make. They would take a factory job on Monday, but Friday they would tell the boss that they can't come in on שבת. Usually the boss would fire them on the spot, and Monday they would look for a new job. Most of the children and grandchildren of these people are still שומרי תורה ומצוות today.



### והיו הדברים האלה

- If someone you love sends you a special letter, the chances are that you will keep it and read it over and over again. The תורה is השם's letter to us. After the מצוה to love comes a מצוה to keep the words of the תורה in our hearts constantly. We do this by reviewing them over and over so, that they will always be "על לבבך" in our heart.
- As mentioned earlier, this מצוה of learning תורה is one of the ways to come to love השם. When we see the infinite wisdom in תורה, we realize what a great privilege it is to serve Him and learn His תורה. Then we come to love Him more and more.

### אשר אנכי מצוך היום

- The מצוות were not commanded on the day משה רבנו said these words. Why does he say that I command you "today?" רש"י tells us a very beautiful thought. The תורה wants us to always hold on to the original excitement and enthusiasm that we had on the day when the תורה was first given. When a king's messenger hangs up a letter for the people of the town to read, everyone comes running to see it. After it's been there for a while, and everyone already knows what it says, they pay no further attention to it. תורה and מצוות shall be in your eyes as if they were just given "today".

### ושננתם לבניך

- Since the very day that ישראל עם received the תורה on הר סיני, they have made it their number one priority to transmit it to their children. Without children learning תורה, all of Judaism would be lost in one or two generations.
- <sup>37</sup>One of the most evil kings of יהודה was אחז המלך. He wanted to destroy תורה and מצוות. He forced all the ישיבות to close, especially the ישיבות of young children, the בית של תינוקות. He knew that without the study of תורה, there will be no more יידישקייט. When he died, his son חזקיהו became the new king. He was a great צדיק<sup>38</sup>. He told the people that they must study תורה, or else. They began to learn like never before. This is why it is so important to us that our children go to ישיבות or בית יעקב schools and learn תורה.
- <sup>39</sup>Originally, every father used to teach his son תורה. During the second בית המקדש, there were periods when many men were killed and their sons had no fathers to learn with them. The כהן גדול of the time, יהושע בן גמלא, with the authority of שטח בן שטח behind him, started a school system in which every city, town and village had to have a teacher to learn תורה with the תלמידים. Most modern nations have a school system which is less than one hundred years old. Our system began over two thousand years ago.

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37. בראשית רבה פרשה מב ג'

38. סנהדרין צד: שנעץ חרב על פתח בית המדרש ואמר כל מי שאינו עוסק בתורה ידקר בחרב זה

39. בבא בתרא כא.

### ודברת בם

- There is a מצוה to speak about דברי תורה all the time, whether at home or on the road. The גמרא tells us about a discussion of הלכה in which רבי עקיבא asked a question to רבן גמליאל and רבי יהושע while shopping for meat to be served at the wedding of רבן גמליאל's son.

### ודברת בם ..... ובשכבך ובקומך

- This פסוק is where we learn the מצוה to recite שמע קריאת twice a day, once in the morning and once at night. Each and every מצוה has been explained to us in the תורה שבעל פה which הר סיני told to משה רבנו on הר סיני. Therefore, even though it is not explicit in the פסוק exactly what we should say, we were מקבל at הר סיני that שמע קריאת is what is being referred to here.
- Although the evening שמע can be recited any time during the night, the שמע of the morning must be recited before a quarter of the daylight time is over. Since this is constantly changing, one should always check a לוח to see when זמן קריאת שמע will be over. Sometimes we might have to get up earlier than usual in order to fulfill this מצוה.

### וקשרתם לאת על ירך

- The מצוה of תפילין really has two מצוות, the תפילין on the arm and the תפילין on the head. Each of these בתים contain the four פרשיות in which the מצוה of תפילין is written in the חומש. The של יד has all four פרשיות on one scroll, whereas the של ראש has four separate compartments, each containing a scroll with just one פרשה.
- The מצוה of תפילין is found here in the שמע because wearing תפילין is part of being מקבל השם. The תפילין are like a <sup>40</sup>machine which helps us bring the thoughts of השם and our loyalty to Him deep inside our נשמות.
- The letter ש is found on the בית of the של ראש. The knot on the של ראש is in the shape of a ט, and the knot on the של יד is in the shape of a י. Together, these spell one of the names of השם, the name ש-ד-י, which means Almighty.
- The ספר החנוך gives us an amazing insight into this מצוה. A person's גוף longs to do all types of עבירות. It is only the spiritual power of the נשמה which stops the person from doing so. However, because the גוף is from the earth and the נשמה is from heaven, the גוף is on home territory, but the נשמה is away from its home territory. The יצר הרע has an advantage over the נשמה. Therefore the נשמה needs guards to help it fight against the יצר הרע. The תפילין are one of those שומרים.
- Before we put on the תפילין we recite a beautiful paragraph about what the תפילין remind us of. It starts מכיון. We say that we are reminded of השם's Oneness, His outstretched

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40. לב אליהו בחלק "מתולדותיו" דף 38

arm and all the miracles He did for us when He took us out of מצרים. We accept on ourselves that the power of our arms (and all our actions), as well as all the desires of our heart will be for the service of השם יתברך. As well, we commit to keeping all the thoughts of our mind pure and holy, always directed toward the service of השם יתברך.

### וכתבתם

- The מזוזה contains only two of the four פרשיות that are in the תפילין. They are שמע and והיה אם שמוע.
- Whenever we leave or enter our home, we put our hand on the מזוזה and give it a kiss. This is because the idea of עול מלכות שמים which the מזוזה contains is the most precious of ideals to our people.
- This is what the רמב"ם<sup>41</sup> writes about the מצוה of מזוזה. "A person should be very careful with מזוזה because it is an obligation on everyone constantly. Whenever he goes in or out, he meets up with (the idea of) the Oneness of השם יתברך's name. He remembers to love Him, and wakes up from his slumber and his foolishness (of being involved) with the petty things of the world. He will know that there is nothing permanent in this world other than the knowledge of the Almighty, and immediately he will set his mind to know Him and go in the ways of the righteous."
- On the outside of the מזוזה is written one of השם יתברך's names. It is ש-ד-י, which means Almighty. However it also stands for שומר דלתות ישראל, (the guardian of Israel's doors). The מצוה of מזוזה protects the Jewish home from harm.
- The גמרא tells us a fascinating story<sup>42</sup>. אונקלוס was a nephew of the Roman emperor, and he had converted to *Yiddishkeit*. When the emperor heard, he was furious. He sent a troop of soldiers to bring אונקלוס back, but when they came, אונקלוס discussed Judaism and they all converted. The emperor sent a second troop, whom he instructed not to discuss Judaism with אונקלוס. He engaged them in a neutral discussion, turned it into a talk about *Yiddishkeit*, and, once again, they all converted. When he sent a third troop, he told them not to talk with אונקלוס at all. Not one word! Just bring him back. אונקלוס could not get them into a discussion, and they were about to take him to Rome. While leaving his home, he put his hand on the מזוזה and kissed it. The soldiers asked him what he was doing. He said to them, "Your king sits in his palace while his soldiers stand outside to guard him. Our king (השם יתברך) commands us to place a מזוזה on the doorpost. Then we

41. וז"ל הרמב"ם (הלכות תפילין מזוזה וס"ת פ"ו כל' י"ג): חייב אדם להזהר במזוזה מפני שהיא חובת הכל תמיד, וכל זמן שיכנס ויצא יפגע ביחוד השם שמו של הקדוש ב"ה ויזכור אהבתו ויעור משנתו ושגיותיו בהבלי הזמן, וידע שאין דבר העומד לעולם ולעולמי עולמים אלא ידיעת צור העולם ומיד הוא חוזר לדעתו והולך בדרכי מישרים, אמרו חכמים הראשונים כל מי שיש לו תפילין בראשו ובזרועו וציצית בבגדו ומזוזה בפתחו מוחזק הוא שלא יחטא שהרי יש לו מזכירין רבים והן הם המלאכים שמצילין אותו מלחטוא שנאמר חונה מלאך יי' סביב ליראיו ויחלצם.

42. עבודה זרה יא.

sit inside while **He** guards us." The soldiers were fascinated, and got into further discussions. In the end, they all converted and the Roman emperor gave up hope of ever bringing אונקלוס back.

- Of course, the מזוזה is not a magic wand. It is the זכות of the מצוה and the מלכות עול which protects us.

### והיה אם שמוע

- The second פרשה of קריאת שמע is שמוע והיה אם שמוע. It is called קבלת עול מצוות by חז"ל. When we say this פרשה, we should focus on the idea that the only way to serve השם and be loyal to Him is by observing His מצוות. There is no substitute.

### ולעבדו בכל לבבכם

- Although we usually translate these words to mean that you shall serve השם *with your heart*, a more precise meaning is to serve Him *in your heart*. חז"ל explain how we serve השם *in our hearts*.<sup>43</sup> It is תפלה which is the service that is done in the heart. Although we *daven* with our lips, the real service is supposed to take place **in our hearts**. The feelings that we have when we *daven*, the thoughts of serving השם and being close to Him are the main purpose of *davening*. Still, we don't *daven* only by thinking, because we would get too easily distracted. So we recite the words with our lips, and think those thoughts in our hearts.

- חז"ל tell us<sup>44</sup> that "הקדוש ברוך הוא ליבא בעי", what השם wants most from us is not just that we should go through the motions of the מצוות, but that "השם wants the heart". A true בן תורה feels close to השם in his heart.

### ונתתי מטר ארצכם ..... ונתתי עשב בשדך

- The next few verses tell us that when we serve השם properly as a nation, He will reward us with benefits in this world. There will be abundant rain and the crops will grow. We will have plenty. If, on the other hand, we stray from השם's ways, we will be punished. The rains will be withheld, the crops will not grow, and finally we will be exiled from our land.

- The רמב"ם<sup>45</sup> explains that the actual reward and punishment for מצוות and עבירות is not in this world, but rather in עולם הבא. If so, what is the meaning of the promises and warnings that we see here in the פסוקים? Here השם is telling us that besides any reward in the World to Come, if we show that we are really intent on keeping His תורה, He will help us by removing all the difficulties from our path. We will have abundant rain and produce, so

43. תענית ב.

44. סנהדרין קו:

45. הלכות תשובה פ"ט

that we will not have to worry about our livelihood. On the other hand, if we show that we don't care about תורה ומצוות, He will take away our opportunities to keep them by making life difficult for us.

### השמרו לכם פן יפתה לבבכם

- In ancient times, the strongest and most tempting יצר הרע was the desire to bow to an idol or worship it in some way. To us, nothing could be sillier. Why would someone want to bow to an idol that he fashioned with his own two hands? Nevertheless, this was the most often repeated עבירה in the whole period of the תנ"ך. The reason is that there was once a יצר הרע for עבודה זרה that we no longer have. That is why we can't understand how someone could be tempted by it. At the beginning of the בית שני, אנשי כנסת הגדולה fasted for three days and begged הקדוש ברוך הוא to take away this יצר הרע, because many people found it too difficult to resist. השם responded to their תפלות and removed that יצר הרע.

- Although the יצר הרע for idol worship no longer exists, we can learn a great lesson from it for our own times. The עבודה זרה never ever did any good for the people who worshipped it. How could it? After all, it had no life. Still they were attracted to it, because that was the test of their time. In that very same way, every generation is tested with its own special tests. Today, youngsters are attracted to various things that they see in the street or hear about in the media. These things do not bring anyone any happiness whatsoever. The people who indulge in them do not find satisfaction there. Nevertheless, they are attracted to them, because that is the test of our times. However, just as there were many people who had the sense and the strength to resist the temptation of עבודה זרה, so, too, can we resist the temptations of our time.

- Everything that the תורה warned us about came true. Although we lived in ארץ ישראל for eight hundred and fifty years, eventually we were forced to leave because we didn't listen to the תורה. In other פרשיות as well, we were warned about being scattered all over the globe as part of the punishment of גלות. All this has come true, and there are Jewish communities spread all around the world. When the Jewish people will do תשובה and return to השם and His תורה, all the good promises will also come true.

### ויאמר - פרשת ציצית

- There is a מצוה to mention יציאת מצרים morning and night. For that reason, we recite ויאמר as part of קריאת שמע because the last פסוק mentions יציאת מצרים.

- קריאת שמע is a very suitable opportunity to mention יציאת מצרים. Just as קריאת שמע is our declaration that we accept the yoke of השם and His מצוות, so, too, does יציאת מצרים remind us that we became השם's servants when He redeemed us from slavery in מצרים.

## דעו לפני מי אתם עומדים

- The importance of remembering יציאת מצרים can not be overemphasized. It was during the period of the מכות and the events that followed that השם יתברך demonstrated His might and mastery over everything in the universe.<sup>46</sup> He showed us how He controls the water, the land, the bugs, the animals, the sky, and even the minds of people. The splitting of the ים סוף is an experience that our people could never forget. Even the non-Jewish nations heard about ים סוף, and were in awe of השם because of it. השם is not going to repeat these miracles. They were shown to us once and for all. Now it is our job to pass them down from generation to generation. We mention these things every day, but we also devote a special night just for this purpose: the night of the סדר.
- There are many other פרשיות in the תורה which mention יציאת מצרים. Nevertheless, הז"ל chose this particular פרשה because it also contains other items that fit in very well with the theme of קריאת שמע. The ציצית remind us to follow all of השם's מצוות, just as we declare when we say שמע. We also learn in the פסוק of תתורו ולא תתורו not to let our thoughts stray to false ideas against the תורה, or עבודה זרה, and not to let our eyes wander to see things which we should not see. All this is perfectly suited to be part of the קריאת שמע.

## ברכה אחרי קריאת שמע

### אמת ויציב

- After we have finished the שמע, we make an amazing statement. We say that **the reason we have accepted all this is because it is אמת, the truth**. Not because it make us feel good or gives us a sense of security. No! That is not why. It is simply because it is the **absolute truth** that there is a בורא עולם, who is the Master of the world. He gave us a wonderful, beloved תורה, and we keep it because it is the דבר השם.

### וטוב ויפה הדבר הזה עלינו לעולם ועד

- We also declare that the תורה is good and wonderful. The תורה does ask us to make certain sacrifices. However, none of these obligations stand in the way of our enjoying **this world**, besides earning **the world to come**. We must keep all the laws of *kashrus*. Still, we may eat our fill from so many kinds of delicious foods, that we don't even feel the restrictions. As long as our clothes contain no שעטנז, we are free to dress ourselves in very fine, dignified clothing. We may own a car and a house, and have a flourishing business. We may marry and have a family. Nothing really important or vital is withheld from us. All this, and we can still spend our lives doing מצוות and earning עולם הבא. Indeed, this is טוב ויפה!

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46. רמב"ן סוף פרשת בא

### סומך גאולה לתפלה

- This ברכה of אמת ויציב is also called גאולה. In it, we remind ourselves of the great miracles that השם did for us in מצרים, מכת בכורות and the סוף ים סוף. Here, too, we are זכירת יציאת מצרים מצוה of מקיים.
- This ברכה is a preparation for שמונה עשרה. The גמרא states, "הסומך", "גאולה לתפלה". Whoever<sup>47</sup> says the ברכה of גאולה right before his שמונה עשרה will be assured of a place in עולם הבא.
- רש"י explains why we should say גאולה right before תפלה: When a person says the ברכה of גאולה, he is praising and appreciating all the נסים that השם did for us in מצרים. This brings him close to השם, and that is the right moment to ask השם for all his needs. If he wouldn't say שמונה עשרה immediately after גאולה, he would be like a friend of the king who knocks on the palace door, but goes away. The king comes to the door, but when he sees that his friend has gone, he also goes away.
- רבנו יונה gives us an explanation why the person that says גאולה right before תפלה is deserving of such great reward. השם took us out of מצרים that we should be His servants. תפלה is called an עבודה to השם. When we remember מצרים יציאת, our gratitude and our obligations to השם, and then perform His service by humbling ourselves to Him in תפלה, we are deserving of עולם הבא. After all, we are His servants.

### שמונה עשרה

- tell<sup>48</sup> us that when we *daven* שמונה עשרה, the שכנינו is directly opposite us. Many of the הלכות of שמונה עשרה are based on this idea. When we speak directly to השם, we can not move around. We must be riveted to our place.
- For the same reason,<sup>49</sup> we do not interrupt the שמונה עשרה even to answer שמייה אמן יהא שמיה רבא or קדושה to say רבא.
- We bow a number of times during the שמונה עשרה, because we are, after all, standing directly before the שכנינו.
- *Davening* שמונה עשרה is<sup>50</sup> like having a private meeting with הקדוש ברוך הוא. That is why we take three steps forward before we begin, so that we should imagine ourselves walking into השם's "office" to talk to Him. When we finish, we take the three steps backwards, in order to realize that our meeting is over.
- <sup>51</sup> We keep our feet together to imitate the מלאכים, who have both their feet attached together as one. Also because, as said before, we are rooted to our place when we speak

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47. ברכות ד:

48. ש"ע אר"ח סימן צ"ה סעיף א'

49. ש"ע אר"ח סימן ק"ד סעיף ז'

50. ש"ע אר"ח סימן צ"ה א' בהגהת רמ"א

51. ש"ע אר"ח סימן צ"ה סעיף א'

directly to השם. We would not move around while speaking to a human ruler. It would be quite disrespectful. How much more so when we speak to הוא ברוך הוא.

- <sup>52</sup>People *davened* even before the הגדולה אנשי כנסת authored the סידור. They had no special times for *davening*, no set text, and could *daven* as often as they wanted. Some people *davened* just once a day. Others may have *davened* numerous times during the day.
- <sup>53</sup>Originally, this תפלה had only eighteen ברכות. However, in the days of רבן גמליאל an extra ברכה was added: the ברכה of ולמלשינים. Now there are really nineteen ברכות, but we still refer to it by the original name, שמונה עשרה.
- <sup>54</sup>The idea to *daven* at specific times was originated by the אבות הקדושים. We find in the תורה that שחרית *davened* אברהם אבינו, and יצחק *davened* מנחה. The תפלה of the night time was begun by יעקב אבינו. Nevertheless, this practice was voluntary until the הגדולה אנשי כנסת made it into a set rule.
- <sup>55</sup>When the הגדולה אנשי כנסת put together the סדור, they made the three daily תפלות correspond with the קרבנות that are brought in the המקדש בית.
- <sup>56</sup>Every day in the המקדש בית, one lamb was brought in the morning and one in the afternoon. These were called קרבן תמיד because they were constant, all 365 days of the year. The morning תפלה goes together with the קרבן תמיד של שחר and the afternoon תפלה goes together with the קרבן תמיד של בין הערבים. The times for the תפלות also correspond with the times that the קרבנות were brought.
- No קרבנות were brought at night in the המקדש בית. However, they could still burn the parts of the day's קרבנות on the מזבח. This was called הקטר הלבנים ואברים <sup>57</sup>and could be done all night. <sup>58</sup>תפלת ערבית corresponds to this.
- These תפלות were put together at the beginning of the second המקדש בית. During that time, the עם ישראל had the זכות of both תפלות and קרבנות at the same time. Today, we no longer have the קרבנות until the המקדש בית will be rebuilt. The נביאים taught us that <sup>59</sup>when we can not bring קרבנות, then השם יתברך accepts the תפלות as a **replacement** for the קרבנות.
- There is another way in which we can replace the קרבנות that we can not bring. <sup>60</sup>When we learn the פרשיות about the קרבנות and the הלכות of קרבנות, we show that we really

52. רמב"ם הלכות תפלה פרק א' הלכה ג'

53. ברכות כח:

54. ברכות כו:

55. ברכות כו:

56. ברכות כו:

57. מגילה פרק ב' משנה ו'

58. ברכות כו:

59. כמאמר הנביא הושע פרק י"ד "ונשלמה פרים שפתינו"

60. מנחות ק"י.



would want to bring them, but we are simply unable to do so. השם יתברך counts this, too, as if we actually brought the קרבנות.

- *Davening* with כוונה means paying attention to what we are saying. <sup>61</sup>There are two types of כוונה that a person should have when *davening* עשרה. One type is to realize that you stand before השם. You are actually talking directly to Him. The second type is to think about the meaning of the words you are saying. (We call this המלות). (פירוש המלות).
- <sup>62</sup>We are supposed to think about פירוש המלות throughout the entire עשרה. However, if we didn't, we don't have to repeat the תפלה. The שלחן ערוך does say that the minimum to have כוונה is by the first ברכה, which is אבות. If we didn't, we are supposed to go back to the beginning of עשרה and start over. If we have already finished שמונה עשרה, we should repeat it again. That is how they conducted themselves in days gone by. However, we know how hard it is for us to maintain כוונה. Therefore, the רמ"א in שלחן ערוך says, in these days we never go back because we neglected to have כוונה. After all, we can't be sure that we will have כוונה the second time either.

#### ג' ראשונות, אמצעיות, ג' אחרונות

- As already said, before the הגדולה organized the סידור, people *davened* as often as they wanted, and at any time they chose. <sup>63</sup>However, their *davening* did follow a specific structure. First they would start with saying praises to הקדוש ברוך הוא. Next they would present their requests for all the things that people need. Last they would say thank you to השם for all the things He gives us.
- <sup>64</sup>This is the same pattern that the שמונה עשרה follows. The first three ברכות are שבחו, expressions of praise to הקדוש ברוך הוא, which is the proper way to start a תפלה. The last three are הודאה, a thank you. The first three and the last three never change. Day in and day out, weekdays and special times, they remain the same. The first three ברכות are קדושת השם, גבורות, אבות. The last three ברכות are שלום, הודאה, עבודה.
- <sup>65</sup>In the first three and last three ברכות of עשרה, we are not allowed to insert any private requests. We are allowed to ask for צרכי רבים (needs of all *Yisroel*), and that is why we may add זכרנו לחיים and the other additions on ימי תשובה.
- <sup>66</sup>The first three ברכות and last three ברכות are each one unit, as if they were just one ברכה. If we make a mistake we have to go back to the beginning of the unit. For example, if someone left out משיב הרוח ומוריד הגשם in the winter, <sup>67</sup>if he already finished המתים

61. ש"ע או"ח סימן צ"ח סעיף א'

62. ש"ע או"ח סימן ק"א סעיף א' ובהגהת רמ"א שם

63. רמב"ם הל' תפלה פ"א הל' ב'

64. ברכות לד.

65. ש"ע או"ח סימן קי"ב סעיף א'

66. משנה ברורה סימן קי"ד ס"ק כ"א

67. ש"ע סימן תקפ"ב ובמשנה ברורה ס"ק ד'

he would have to go back to the beginning of אבות, not to אתה גבור. Likewise, if someone forgot to say המלך הקדוש during עשרת ימי תשובה, he would have to go back to the beginning of אבות, not to אתה קדוש.

- During the weekdays, the middle section is where we ask השם for many things we need. Each ברכה in this section contains a request for some human need, whether in גשמיות or in רוחניות. This section has thirteen ברכות. Originally it had twelve, but ולמלשינים was added later.
- Everything we ask for is in לשון רבים. We don't just ask for ourselves, but rather for everyone.
- <sup>68</sup>In this middle part of עשרה עשרה, we are allowed to insert private requests. For example, in רפאנו we may *daven* for a specific חולה. In ברך עלינו we may put in a request to find a job or for השם to grant הצלחה in our business. In שמע קולנו we may add a request for any Of our needs.
- The only section that varies from occasion to occasion is the middle section, depending on the day it is being said. <sup>69</sup>On שבת and ימים טובים we do not make personal requests. We replace all the ברכות of the middle section with one single ברכה, which talks about the specialness of that particular day. We call these שבת and יום טוב single ברכות by the name קדושת היום.
- Only once a year on a יום טוב do we have more than one ברכה in the middle section. That is on ראש השנה in תפלת מוסף, where we add three special ברכות. We call them מלכויות and זכרונות ושופרות. We include קדושת היום as part of מלכויות.

### ד' שפתי תפתח

- <sup>70</sup>We ask השם to open up our lips to speak. This פסוק was recited by דוד המלך when he was doing תשובה for an עבירה for which a קרבן could not atone. He asked השם to accept his תפלה instead of a קרבן. We, too, have no קרבנות today. Therefore, we ask השם to accept our תפלות instead of קרבנות.

### אבות

- The first ברכה of the עשרה עשרה is called אבות. Our special connection with the של רבונו began from our forefathers. השם made the Jewish people His chosen nation, because He loved the אבות so much, and we are their children. Therefore, we begin our תפלה by addressing השם as אלקי אבותינו, the G-d of our fathers.

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68. ש"ע או"ח סימן קי"ט סעיף א'  
69. משנה ברורה סימן רצ"ד ס"ק ב'  
70. רבנו יונה ברכות ד:

## דעו לפני מי אתם עומדים

- <sup>71</sup>We say ואלקי אבותינו first and then אלקינו. Actually, השם was the G-d of our fathers first, and then our G-d. Nevertheless, we put אלקינו first, because we are supposed to take the אמונה which we received from our אבות, think about it and internalize it until it becomes our own. Then we can say אלקינו, and that is our ultimate goal: to create our own recognition of השם based on what we received from previous generations. The basics are so obvious that we can see them with our own *seichel*. For matters that are beyond our ability to understand, we can rely only on the אמונה we received from אבותינו.
- <sup>72</sup>There are infinite ways in which we can describe השם's greatness. Nevertheless, we limit ourselves to the ones that משה רבנו said in the תורה. In פרשת עקב we find that משה רבנו referred to השם as הקדוש הגדול הגבור והנורא. Therefore, we also address השם by these titles in this first ברכה of the עשרה שמונה עשרה. If we said a lot of titles, it might seem as if we are trying to say all of השם's praises, which is, of course, impossible to do. So we limit ourselves to just these three.

### גבורות

- There is no limit to השם's ability. He is in complete control of everything in creation. The greatest display of His might will be when הקדוש ברוך הוא brings back the dead people to life. This idea of תחיית המתים is so important that this ברכה begins and ends with it. It is, as mentioned before, one of the עקרי אמונה.
- <sup>73</sup>Although it is hard for us to imagine תחיית המתים, there is something on earth which gives a little glimpse of this. The caterpillar spins a cocoon around itself. Inside, the caterpillar's body dissolves completely, and then reassembles itself in the form of a butterfly. This is what will happen to the bodies that are currently lying in their graves. They, too, will once again have limbs and veins and be covered with skin.
- While mentioning the might and power of הקדוש ברוך הוא, we include in the list of things that He controls גבורות גשמים, the power of rain. משיב הרוח ומוריד הגשם. All life on earth depends on the rain, but why do we mention the wind? <sup>74</sup>Without the winds we could not survive. The sun evaporates huge amounts of water from the oceans. These form the clouds. These clouds would be useless without the winds to blow them over the continents. There they drop their rain, make the plants grow, supplying us with drinking water and sustaining all living things.

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71. פירוש דובר שלום באוצר התפלות

72. ברכות ל"ג.

73. תפארת ישראל בדרוש אור החיים (אחרי מס' סנהדרין) בדבור המתחיל ואם אתה אחי

74. Rejoice O' Youth par. 63 - Rav Avigdor Miller

### קדושת השם

• The idea of this ברכה is that to truly understand השם is really beyond our ability. קדושה means something set aside, removed from us. We can get a little idea of His greatness from looking at His creations, but He Himself is beyond the ability of the human mind to understand. In עולם הבא, when the נשמה is alone without the גוף, we will have a better understanding of the Creator.

### קדושה בשעת חזרת הש"ץ

- Besides the ברכה of קדושת השם which we say in the silent עשרה שמונה, there is a קדושה which we say together with the צבור when the חזן repeats the עשרה שמונה. The תורה tells us that השם says, "ונקדשתי בתוך בני ישראל". One of the ways that we fulfill this מצוה is when we say a שבקדושה, such as קדיש or ברכו or קדושה. The גמרא teaches us that no דבר can be said without a מנין, as the פסוק says, "בתוך בני ישראל".
- It is not possible for us to imagine the excitement of the מלאכים in שמים when they sing שירה before השם. The crowd's enthusiasm in a stadium when the home team has just won the World Series is nothing in comparison. At the beginning of קדושה we say that we want to declare השם's greatness just as the מלאכים do on high. We jump up a little each time we say the word קדוש and when we say ברוך כבוד, because that is precisely what the מלאכים do when they say קדוש. They lift themselves up higher and higher in unbelievable excitement.

### אתה חונן

- ברכות. אתה חונן is the very first of the requests we make to השם in this middle section of ברכות.<sup>75</sup>If we had no דעת, we couldn't make any requests at all.
- Some people may mistakenly think that they are in control of their own minds. They take their ability to think for granted. Therefore, we start this ברכה by saying, "It is you, השם, that kindly gives us the ability to think".
- <sup>76</sup>In מצרים, after the first nine מכות, בני ישראל were commanded to ask the מצריים for gold and silver vessels. The מצריים hated the Jews. Their land was ruined. They had all suffered. They gave them whatever they asked for **graciously**. This was a great נס. In the first nine מכות בני ישראל saw how השם is in complete control of everything in nature; the water, the bugs, the animals, and the sky, etc. Now they were being shown that when השם wants to, He can even control the human mind as well.
- There are many different kinds of knowledge. There is knowledge of תורה, of business, and knowledge of how to fix things that are broke, Simple common sense to make

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75. עיין בביאור הגר"א ש"ע או"ח סימן רצ"ד ס"ק א'  
76. ספר נפלאות מתורת ד' ית' ח"ב דף 123 בשם מהר"ל מפראג בספר מעשה ד'

reasonable decisions in everyday life is also a very important type of knowledge. So if you are learning a difficult piece of גמרא or entering into a business deal, you should remember to ask הקב"ה for His help to put the right thoughts into your mind. The same if you are taking a בחינה, or if someone has asked you for advice. The ability to think and respond sensibly is all from the רבונו של עולם.

- Some people suffer from mental health issues. Their thinking is a somewhat out of order. They may be depressed for no good reason, or frightened when there is really nothing to be afraid of. Older people sometimes lose their ability to think straight, and even to remember things that they just heard or saw five minutes ago. We should have in mind when we say אתה חונן that we are asking השם to cure them and spare us from these terrible conditions.
- If someone longs to become a תלמיד חכם, of course he needs to learn בהתמדה, but also to *daven* for it. <sup>77</sup>As ל"ה tell us, "ירבה בישיבה ויתפלל למי שהחכמה שלו", (he should sit and learn very much, but also pray to the one from whom wisdom comes).
- On מוצאי שבת we recite הבדלה in this ברכה, (besides the הבדלה we will recite later over a כוס). There are <sup>78</sup>two reasons that הבדלה is said in אתה חונן. Although we often take it for granted, it takes a lot of brain power to realize that there is a difference between שבת and the weekday. ל"ה say, "אם אין דעת הבדלה מניין"; if not for intelligence, how could we tell the difference between one thing and another? The second reason is that we don't make private requests in our תפלות on שבת. Therefore, in the very first ברכה of בקשה, we say הבדלה, and then we are permitted to ask for our needs.

### השיבנו אבינו לתורתך

- Before we ask השם to bring us close to His service, we ask Him to return us to the study of His תורה. When we learn תורה, we become inspired to do all of השם's מצוות. If <sup>79</sup>we don't learn תורה, we "cool off" in our performance of מצוות as well.
- When a person does an עבירה, he has rebelled against השם, Who commanded us not to do that particular thing. Not only that, but he has actually stained his נשמה as well. How terrible it would be if we could never undo an עבירה and make our נשמות clean again. For this reason, הקב"ה created the power of תשובה. If we do proper תשובה, that עבירה is erased from the record as if it never happened.
- When the first המקדש בית was destroyed, <sup>80</sup>some of the leaders of the people came to יחזקאל, who was the נביא in בבל where the Jewish people had been exiled. They said that

77. נדה ע:

78. ברכות לג. ועיין בביאור הגר"א ש"ע או"ח סימן רצ"ד ס"ק א'

79. וז"ל חיי אדם בהל' יום הכפור כלל קמ"ג הל' א' "וביטול תלמוד תורה כנגד כולם כי הרחוק מן התורה רחוק מעבודת הבורא

ולכן תקנו השיבנו אבינו לתורתך וקרבונו מלכנו לעבודתך"

80. יחזקאל פרק ל"ג

they were embarrassed over all the עבירות they had done, and were truly sorry. However, they absolutely did not believe that there was anything that could be done to correct the situation. After all, once the harm is done, how can it be removed? יהזקאל had to promise them in the name of השם that indeed תשובה would help undo their past sins.

- <sup>81</sup>Doing תשובה requires that we do three things. First of all we must be sorry that we did whatever עבירה we did. We must also make up our minds to never repeat that sin. Then we must say ודוי and confess before הוא הקדוש ברוך הוא that we did an עבירה. This is the minimum of תשובה.

- תשובה is needed not only when we do something wrong, but also if we have neglected to do a positive מצוה. If someone didn't put on תפילין one day, or didn't בענטש after eating bread, that person would need to do תשובה for that sin.

- <sup>82</sup>The Jewish people had been committing עבירות long before the first המקדש בית was destroyed. השם sent many נביאים to warn them. Even in the last hours before the חורבן, the תשובה ירמיהו told them that they could still correct things if only they would do תשובה.

- הוא הקדוש ברוך הוא loves us very much. Even when we anger Him, He does not want to harm us in any way. He is "הרוצה בתשובה", the One Who wants us to do תשובה.

### סלה לנו

- In the previous ברכה, we asked השם to help us do תשובה. Now we request that השם actually accept our תשובה and forgive us.

- חטאנו means that we sinned unintentionally. Even a sin which is not done deliberately needs כפרה. For certain very serious עבירות, a קרבן is required in order to achieve forgiveness, even though the sin was not done deliberately. For example, if a person forgot that it was שבת and did a מלאכה, such as cooking something, he would have to bring a קרבן חטאת. If a person forgot that it was פסח and ate some חמץ, the same would apply.

- Even the person that brings a קרבן for an עבירה still has to do תשובה. A קרבן that comes without תשובה is unacceptable to השם. We might ask, if the person has already done תשובה, why does he also need a קרבן? Isn't the תשובה enough? The answer is that a sin is like a stain on a garment. A very deep stain will not come out with just one wash. When a person does an עבירה, the person's נשמה becomes stained. With תשובה, most of the stain is washed out, but in the case of very serious sins there is still some stain left. To remove the rest of the stain, a קרבן is needed.<sup>83</sup>

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81. רמב"ם הל' תשובה פרק ב' הלכה ב'

82. עיין ירמיהו פרק ל"ח ועוד כמה מקומות שם

83. רבנו יונה בספר שערי תשובה שער א' אות ט' ושער ד' אות ב'

## דעו לפני מי אתם עומדים

• <sup>84</sup>פשענו refers to עבירות that were done deliberately. The person knew he was doing a sin, but did it anyway. Even for such sins, השם is willing to forgive us if we are sincere about our תשובה.

### ראה בענינו

• The Jewish people have been in גלות for almost two thousand years. During that time, we have suffered from all types of discrimination and oppression. We were chased out of almost every country in Europe at some point in time. There were pogroms, blood libels, the crusades, and the massacres by the Cossacks. Haman, Hitler and Stalin, ימח שמהם וזכרם, all tried to wipe us out. Even today, there are nations in the world that say openly that they would like to destroy us. In Israel, there is a constant threat of terrorists from the surrounding Arab nations. Here, too, we have no guarantee. Sometimes people are attacked or property is vandalized because of anti-Semitism. In this ברכה we ask that all these oppressions and fears should finally come to an end, and that השם will protect us from such things.

• The very beginning of the גאולה for which we have waited so long will be that we will be relieved from the threat of all our enemies, just as the *Yidden* in מצרים were freed from their slavery sometime before they went out free.

• Those of us who live in the United States and Canada hardly ever think about this. These countries have been very kind to us. They do not have any laws forbidding Jews to own land, or to engage in various types of livelihoods. If we need the police, they will respond to our call, just as they respond to the calls of our gentile neighbors. We should not take this for granted. We must be very grateful to them, and hope and pray that it continues to be so.

### רפאנו

• A person must know that his health is completely dependent upon השם יתברך. The תורה allows us to take medicine and go to a doctor when we need to.<sup>85</sup> We do not say that if השם allowed us to get sick, we can not go against His will to make ourselves better. Nevertheless, even when we go to the doctor, we must remember that the doctor is only a messenger from השם. Sometimes, even though the doctor tries to help, he is unsuccessful. It all depends on what the will of השם יתברך is.

• We once had a very great king named אסא המלך. He was a descendant of דוד המלך. When he became old, he had severe problems in his legs. <sup>86</sup>The תנ"ך tells us that he sought the help of the doctors, but he did not seek the help of השם. He went to the doctors, but didn't

84. יומא ל"ו:

85. בבא קמא פה. "ורפא ירפא מכאן שניתנה רשות לרופא לרפאות"

86. דברי הימים ב' פרק טז פסוק יב

think of *davening* to השם. Although he was a great צדיק, this was considered a terrible error on his part. We must always remember that השם is the true healer, and the doctor is only a שליח.

- When we say רפאנו, we are not only asking to be healed if we are already sick. A good doctor advises his patients how to avoid getting sick. <sup>87</sup>Saying רפאנו means we ask השם to keep us healthy when we are well, in addition to healing us when we are not well. Even when we are well, we must never forget that our continued health depends on the רבונו של עולם.
- As we mentioned before, all requests are made in לשון רבים, because we ask not only for ourselves, but for others as well. One of the most important ideas that the תורה teaches us is to not be selfish. There are so many sick people, some of them chronically ill, many in hospitals. When we say רפאנו, we should have all of them in mind.
- There is a תפלה which can be added if we have a particular sick person in mind. It is found in most סידורים. The last words are בתוך שאר חולי ישראל. We ask specifically for our friend or relative, but include all the other ill people as well.

### ברך עלינו

• This is the תפלה for פרנסה. In גן עדן, it was not necessary for אדם הראשון to make any effort to get his פרנסה. Everything was prepared for him, and all he needed to do was eat. After he did the sin of eating from the עץ הדעת, he was punished to have to earn his livelihood. "בזעת אפך תאכל לחם". From now on, he and all his descendants would have to work to eat. So, every person has to do something to earn a living. Although we need to work, our livelihood depends solely on what השם decides to give us. Every year on ראש השנה, it is decided how much פרנסה that person will earn in the coming year.

This is quite a big test for a person, because since we have to work in order to receive our allotment, we can easily forget השם and come to think that we are the ones who are making the פרנסה. If we are smart, we make more money. If not, we make less. That is not really the case. Many smart people have been unsuccessful, and many not so smart people have been successful. Nevertheless, it is human nature to make this mistake. This תפלה, which we say three times a day, helps us remember that our success or failure in earning a living is really in the hands of השם יתברך.

• When we say ברך עלינו, we have many things in mind. We pray that there will be enough rain to make the crops grow, and that nothing else should happen to spoil the crops. We pray that business should be successful and everyone should have פרנסה. We also are hoping that we will not suffer losses from other causes, such as theft or damage. All these contribute to a person's livelihood.

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87. עיין רש"י פר' בשלה פרק טו פסוק כו בד"ה כי אני ד' רפאך



## דעו לפני מי אתם עומדים

- Of course, when we say this ברכה, we are asking that our family should have enough food and other needs. However, as mentioned before, we do not *daven* only for ourselves. We have in mind that all the poor people should have sufficient money to buy food and all the other things that their families need. When you see people going around trying to collect money, you should feel bad for them. They don't want to be doing this. They just don't have a choice. There are people who go to bed hungry, because they don't have enough food to eat. They can not pay their bills. Not only must we give צדקה to poor people, and support through organizations like תומכי שבת and קופת העיר, but we also have to *daven* for them. השם wants every Jew to care about every other Jew.

### תקע בשופר

- Everything that has befallen the Jewish people has been foretold in the תורה. The חורבן, the exiles, the persecutions, and the dispersion all across the globe. One prophecy has not yet been fulfilled: the promise of the גאולה. In (פרק ל) the תורה predicted a period of redemption for the Jewish people. The כלל ישראל will return to הקדוש ברוך הוא with full hearts, and then they will be gathered together and returned to the land of their forefathers. This is what we wait for every day. The נביא ישעיהו foretold that at the time of the redemption there will be the blowing of a great שופר, and then the dispersed *Yidden* will be brought back. Therefore we ask השם to blow a great שופר and gather us back from the four corners of the earth.

- There was a great רבי לוי יצחק מברדיטשוב by the name of חסידיש'ע רבי. He always spoke to השם in favor of the Jewish people. One ראש השנה he said the following תפלה:

ברבוננו של עולם! Every year, *Yidden* all around the world blow the שופר for You. They blow one hundred קולות, year after year. All they ask of you is to blow one קול, and that is: תקע בשופר גדול!

- The תורה promised that the גאולה would come only when the *Yidden* will do תשובה. Most Jews today have lost their connection to תורה and to the ברבוננו של עולם. *Yidden* who are שומרי תורה ומצוות also have many areas in which they need to improve. We might despair, but the רמב"ם tells us that the תורה also promised that the *Yidden* will do תשובה at the end of their גלות. Then השם will help, and it is going to happen. Soon, we hope.

- Up until about forty years ago, many Jews were going away from *Yiddishkeit*, but almost none were coming back to *Yiddishkeit*. Things started to gradually change. Special Yeshivos were opened for people who had no background, but wanted to learn about their heritage. This small beginning rapidly became a major movement: the תשובה movement. Today, there are tens of thousands of בעלי תשובה. It is quite obvious that this is the beginning of the תשובה that the תורה promised us would happen at the end of our גלות. Let us hope that this continues to grow, and leads us straight to the גאולה.

### השיבה שופטינו

- The תורה commanded us to appoint judges in every city and in every שבט. These judges made up a בית דין called סנהדרין. In ירושלים was the דין הגדול, which had seventy one דינים. A long time ago, the סנהדרין ceased to function. In this ברכה, we ask השם to bring back the שופטים as we had in days of old. השם promised<sup>88</sup> this to us through הנביא ישעיהו. He said "ואשיבה שופטיך כבראשונה ויועצריך כבתחלה". This תפלה borrows these word from the תפלה and we say השיבה שופטינו כבראשונה ויועצינו כבתחלה. Please bring back our judges as in the early days. May this happen very soon. אמן.
- We ask השם to take sorrow and sighing away from us. What is this sadness we refer to? The תורה is our guide for life. The עולם של רבונו gave it to us so that we would know exactly how to live our lives successfully in accordance with His תורה. When we have confusion about what the תורה commands us, we endure sorrow and sighing. When the סנהדרין was around, we had absolute clarity on all issues.
- One of the sins that was mentioned numerous times by the נביאים was the sin of not doing justice in בית דין for the people who couldn't defend themselves. ישעיהו says, "שפטו"<sup>89</sup>, "Judge for the orphan, argue on behalf of the widow." Judging fairly is one of the things which maintains order in the world. It was up to the סנהדרין to see that this was done.

### ולמלשינים

- This ברכה was not part of the original עשרה. It was added much later in the days of רבן גמליאל. It is a request to destroy the מינים, who try to spread lies about the תורה and the Jewish people.
- In the time of the second המקדש, בית המקדש, the Jewish people suffered greatly from various groups of מינים. There were the צדוקים and the בייתותים who claimed that they did not believe in תורה שבעל פה. The רמב"ם tells us<sup>90</sup> that this was actually a lie. They didn't believe in anything, not even in השם and His תורה. Their only desire was to gain power over the Jewish people, and they knew that the people would not tolerate them if they said the truth. So they claimed that they believed in everything except for the תורה שבעל פה. They wanted to undermine the people's trust in the חכמים. They caused tremendous harm to our people from the very earliest days of the second המקדש.
- <sup>91</sup> In the days of רבן גמליאל a new problem arose. The early Christians were slanderers, who would go to the Romans and advise them how to hurt the Jews. They also tried to win over Jews to their new (false) religion. The חכמים tell us that it is worse to cause a

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88. ישעיה פרק א'

89. ישעיה פרק א'

90. פירוש המשנה פרקי אבות פ"א משנה ג'

91. רמב"ם הל' תפלה פרק ב' הלכה א'

person to sin than to murder him. Whoever murders someone takes away his life from this world. The one who causes him to sin takes away his life from **עולם הבא**. When רבן גמליאל saw that this was greater than all the other needs that people have, he rose up with his **בית דין** and added this new **ברכה**.

- <sup>92</sup>When רבן גמליאל asked for someone to author this **ברכה**, it was שמואל הקטן who came forward to do it. <sup>93</sup>The **חכמים** once heard a heavenly voice saying that one of them was worthy that the **שכינה** should rest upon him, but that the generation did not deserve such a thing. Immediately, the **חכמים** put their eyes on שמואל הקטן. They were confident that he was the most worthy of such greatness.

- Originally, the Christians weren't honest about their beliefs. They pretended to be regular, believing Jews. They *davened* with us and kept other **מצוות**, but believed in a false belief, and tried to convince others as well. It was necessary to reveal who they were in order to distance ourselves from them. This **ברכה** helped to reveal them. After all, it is a curse on them, and a request to destroy them. They would never recite this **ברכה**. From then on, they would refuse to be the **חזן** that would repeat the **עשרה עשרה**. Eventually, we came to see who they were, and they formed their own group, separate from **ישראל**. Knowing who they were made it much easier to deal with them.

### על הצדיקים

- The Jewish people need the guidance and the merit of the **צדיקים**. In this **ברכה** we ask **השם** to preserve the **צדיקים** for us, and to let us be connected to their way of life. "Give our portion with them". Let it be seen that the ones who trust in **השם** are rewarded by His favor and help.

- When אברהם אבינו davened to **השם** not to destroy **סדום**, he was told that if would find there fifty **צדיקים** could be found there, **השם** would sustain the entire place for their sake. <sup>94</sup>We see that the **צדיקים**'s good deeds are a **זכות** for the entire world. When we say this **ברכה**, we are hoping that **השם** will let them live and be well for a very long time.

- We also single out the **גרי הצדק** in this **ברכה**. The **גר** has done a very great and difficult thing. <sup>95</sup>He left behind everything he grew up with, his friends, his society, and his old way of life. Why did he do this? He realized that the only truth in this world is with the Jewish people and their **תורה**. He could not continue to live a lie any longer. So he made this great sacrifice and came to be **מגייר**. We *daven* specially for such people, together with the **תפלה** for the welfare of the **צדיקים**.

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92. ברכות כח:

93. סנהדרין יא.

94. סנהדרין צט:

95. כמו שאמר בועז לרות (מגילת רות פרק ב') ותעזבי אביך וארץ מולדתך ותלכי אל עם אשר לא ידעת תמול שלשם

## ולירושלים

• רבונו של עולם was not only the capital of our country. It was actually the place which the רבונו של עולם designated to have His שכינה come to dwell. When the *Yidden* first came to ארץ ישראל, the משכן was placed in שילה. The משכן was intended to be only a temporary מקדש. Eventually, a permanent site would be chosen to build the בית המקדש. Where that site was going to be, no one knew. The תורה mentions it many times as המקום אשר יבחר השם, the place which השם will choose. Eventually, שמואל הנביא and דוד המלך figured out the exact place. This was the specialness of ירושלים, the place where השם would choose to let His presence dwell. This is precisely what we are asking for in this ברכה, that the רבונו של עולם should make ירושלים once again the dwelling place of the שכינה.

## את צמח דוד

- The מלכות was promised to שבט יהודה in the ברכת יעקב. Which of יהודה's families this would come from was not known.<sup>96</sup> Eventually, דוד was chosen to be the מלך over ישראל. Because of דוד's great love for השם, he wanted desperately to have the זכות to build the בית המקדש. He was told that not he, but his son שלמה, would be the one to build the בית המקדש. At that time, השם informed him that his right to be the king would be forever, and would never be taken away and given to some one else, even another person from שבט יהודה. The מלכות of דוד בית דוד is forever.
- If השם chose דוד for מלכות forever, we can just imagine how beloved דוד must have been to his Creator.<sup>97</sup> The תנ"ך tells us many times that דוד always walked in השם's path and did His will.<sup>98</sup> Even when once דוד committed an עבירה, he did such extraordinary תשובה for it that he serves as an example of how to do תשובה for all future generations.
- When the גאולה finally comes, we will once again have a king from the descendants of דוד המלך. That king is the one we call משיח. The word משיח means "anointed" with a special oil called שמן המשחה. Not every king needed to be anointed. If there was a dispute over who would be the next king, or if there was a lapse in time since the last king, the king would be anointed to demonstrate that this is indeed the real מלך. When משיח finally comes, it will be after a lapse of about two thousand five hundred years since the last king from דוד. We will anoint him. For this reason he is called the משיח.
- Restoring the מלכות of דוד בית דוד is a very important part of the גאולה for which we have been waiting for almost two thousand years. Therefore, in this ברכה, we ask that השם quickly restore the מלכות of דוד and bring the long awaited ישועה.

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96. שמואל ב' פרק ז'

97. מלכים א' פרק טו פסוק ה' (ועוד במה מקומות)

98. עבודה זרה ה.

### שמע קולנו

- This is the final ברכה of the middle section of עשרה. In it, we ask that השם יתברך listen to all our תפלות and not send us away empty handed. We reaffirm our belief that indeed He is listening to our תפלות.
- It is permissible to include any type of private requests in this תפלה, after the words ומלפניך מלכנו ריקם אל תשיבנו. Indeed, the גמרא states that a person who never includes his own private requests does not realize what it means to plead with השם for his needs. Of course, we have already requested everything we need in a general way. We asked for knowledge, תשובה, forgiveness, health, פרנסה, etc. But when a person has a relative who is not well, it's only natural that he would want to request a speedy recovery **specifically for that person**. If a person is starting a business or going through financial difficulty, he would surely want to ask השם for his help. Neglecting to do so indicates that he does not appreciate the marvelous opportunity to speak to השם and place our requests before Him.
- On fast days, we add the תפלה of עננו in this ברכה. In עננו we ask to be relieved of the צרה for which we have made a תענית. Although the חזן says it as an extra ברכה before רפאנו, we just add a תפלה without the חתימה of השם אתה חזן. Therefore, we add it here in שמע קולנו, just as we put our other individual requests here.

### שלש אחרונות

- The last three ברכות of עשרה are one unit, just as are the first three. If we make a mistake in any one, if we have already started the next ברכה, we have to go back to רצה.
- <sup>99</sup>The גמרא compares these three last ברכות to a servant that received a tip from his master and is now expressing his gratitude prior to taking his master's leave.

### רצה

- This ברכה is called עבודה by חז"ל. In פרקי אבות we learn that <sup>100</sup>"the world stands on three things", one of which is עבודה. Bringing קרבנות is the main עבודה, but <sup>101</sup>davening is also עבודה.
- When נח came out of the תבה, he built a מזבח and brought up עולות on it. השם was pleased, and swore not to bring such a מבול again. <sup>102</sup>From here you see that the world stands on עבודה. Since we have not had the המקדש בית for almost two thousand years, it is a little hard for us to imagine what an experience it was to bring a קרבן. Certainly השם has no need for our קרבנות. We are the ones who derive the benefit from bringing a

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99. ברכות לד.

100. פרק א' משנה ב'

101. תענית ב.

102. פירוש ר"ע ברטנורא פרקי אבות פרק א' משנה ב'

## דעו לפני מי אתם עומדים

קרבן. The very word קרבן means to "come close". We come to feel closer to השם, and that is a wonderful favor for a person.

- <sup>103</sup>The בניאים told us not to remain silent, but to constantly ask for the return of the בית המקדש, the rebuilding of ירושלים and the return of מלכות בית דוד. When you say רצה, you are adding your תפלה to the millions of תפלות that your ancestors *davened* for the return of the בית המקדש.
- The very last period before משיח comes is called עקבתא דמשיחא. This means the footsteps of משיח, when he is so close that we can almost hear his footsteps. We are now in the time of עקבתא דמשיחא and we await the גאולה any day. We should put extra כח in to this תפלה, because it is so close to being answered.
- חז"ל tell us that תפלה is also a form of עבודה. Instead of bringing an animal to the בית המקדש, we "bring a קרבן" in our own hearts, by *davening* to השם, thinking about Him, asking Him for what we need, and realizing that He is in total control of the world. For this reason, when we ask for the return of קרבנות and their acceptance by השם, we also ask him to accept graciously all the תפלות of ישראל.

## מודים

- In מודים, we thank השם יתברך for the endless kindness He showers upon us. We say על חיינו המסורים בידך, for our lives that are given into Your hands. Every moment that a person is alive is a present from השם. A person's life is very fragile. It doesn't take that much to end it. Endless times, השם protects us from near tragedy, when we are walking in the street, riding in a car, or even sitting at home. Remember the time that some reckless driver cut you off in traffic? ברוך השם that nothing happened, although it was a close call. Sometimes we don't even realize how close we were to a disaster. The חכמים say: אין בעל הנס מכיר בנסו. The person to whom a נס happens is often unaware of it. For all this we bow our heads to השם in gratitude, and say על חיינו המסורים בידך.
- When we go to sleep at night, we entrust our נשמות to הוא הקדוש ברוך הוא.
- If we would pay better attention, we would see endless marvelous things everywhere in the world around us. הקדוש ברוך הוא could have made a black and white world, with no color. Instead, we have blue skies, green grass, and flowers of every color. Imagine if all food grew on trees in the form of tasteless nuggets. Instead, we have fruits of every flavor and color, all types of vegetables, meat, fish and eggs. We need oxygen from the air every second of our lives, so air is everywhere. The oxygen in the air would eventually get all used up, but we breath out a gas called carbon dioxide. Trees and plants take in carbon dioxide and give off oxygen. This cycle goes on endlessly, and the supply of oxygen we

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103. כמו שכתוב ישעיה ס"ב "ואל תתנו דמי לו עד יכונן ועד ישים את ירושלים תהלה בארץ"

## דעו לפני מי אתם עומדים

need is never used up. Without water we can not live, so we have water in a very great supply. These are just some of the נפלאות we need to thank השם for when we say מודים.

- If you are comfortable and not in pain while you are listening to this explanation of the תפלות, that means that trillions of things in your body are working right. It only requires one thing to malfunction for a person to be in pain, or even die. One gland, one nerve, one muscle. Your heart keeps going every minute of your life. It is pumping blood to every single one of your sixty trillion cells, supplying them with the oxygen and the nutrients that they need to survive. There are blood vessels **everywhere in your body**. Big ones, medium ones, small ones, and very tiny ones. They reach everywhere in your body. If they were to be stretched out in a straight line, they would stretch for 96,000 miles. All this in one little body! ועל נפלאותיך וטובותיך שבכל עת

## שים שלום

- The ברכות in בהקתי finish off with the blessing בארץ שלום ונתתי. There רש"י tells us that even after all the other blessings mentioned, without שלום there is really nothing. A person can not enjoy any of the ברכות if there is no שלום. We finish off the עשרה שמונה with this ברכה of שלום, that all of our previous requests should be worthwhile. We also ask that השם bless us with אור פניך, with the shine of his face. He should smile at us, and be happy and pleased with us: that we should be בשלום with our Creator.

## עלינו

- As we prepare to leave the *davening*, we express our thanks to הקדוש ברוך הוא for not putting our portion in life with the other nations who pray to gods that are not alive. We *daven* to הוא מלך מלכי המלכים הקדוש ברוך הוא. We thank Him for granting us the privilege to speak to Him. After all, He is so high and mighty, He stretched out the heavens and founded the earth. Can little people such as us speak to Him? Yes! He allows us to *daven* to Him regularly, and listens to us! He is our king, our G-d, and we are totally devoted to Him.

- ראוני have written that <sup>104</sup>we have a מסורה that the author of עלינו was none other than יריחו. The first city that בני ישראל conquered in ארץ ישראל was the city of יריחו. The city was surrounded by impenetrable walls. השם commanded יהושע to make the people march around the city once each day for six days. On the seventh day, which was שבת, they marched around seven times, the wall was swallowed up into the ground, and they were able to conquer the city. While they were marching around the city, they were saying the words of עלינו, thanking השם for not making them like the idol worshippers inside the city. They were also declaring that their intention in destroying the city was

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104. עיין בפירוש עיני תפלה באוצר התפלות

only to fulfill the explicit command of השם, Who wanted them destroyed because of their wickedness.

- <sup>105</sup>The ראש מוסף of תפלה is actually an important part of the מלכויות ברכה in the תפלה השנה. Sometime later in history it became customary to recite it at the end of every תפלה.

### על כן

- Loyal subjects of a king want to see everyone obey him. We say that we look forward to the days when the גאולה will come, when the entire world will recognize the one true Creator. Everyone will pray to Him and bow only to Him. On that day, השם will be (recognized as) One, and His name will be One. אמן

### תפלת מנחה

- *Chazal* tell us that the *z'chus* of *tefilas mincha* is especially great. *Shacharis* comes in the beginning of the day before a person goes off to work. *Ma'ariv* comes at the end of the day, when everything is done, but *mincha* comes right in the middle of a person's work or other involvements. He has to stop whatever he is doing in order to *doven mincha*.<sup>106</sup>
- When the ten tribes were worshipping *avoda zara*, *Eliyahu* told them that they would make a test to see whose G-d could make a fire burn up their *korban*. The prophets of the *Ba'al* put a *korban* on their *mizbeach*, and *Eliyahu* put one on his. When *Eliyahu* was *dovening* to *Hashem* to send fire down to burn up his *korban*, the *pasuk* says that the answer to *Eliyahu's tefilah* came at the time of *mincha*. Therefore the *chachomim* tell us that a person should be especially careful with the prayer of *mincha*, because even *Eliyahu* was only answered at the time of *mincha*.<sup>107</sup>
- The weekday *mincha* consists of four parts, אשרי and שמונה עשרה, then תחנון and עלינו. For explanation of these *tefilos*, please refer back to the *Shachris* section of this booklet.

### אשרי יושבי ביתך

- We say *p'sukei d'zimra* in the morning to put us in the right mood to communicate with *Hashem*. We say *Ashrei* before the *Shmoneh Esrei* of *mincha* for exactly the same reason. In these verses, *Dovid Hamelech* expresses his love and awe of *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*.
- The *Gemora* tells us that whoever recites *Tehila L'Dovid (Ashrei)* three times a day is guaranteed a place in *Olam Haba*. Of course this doesn't mean if we say it without

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105. עיין בפירוש עיון תפלה באוצר התפלות

106. טור אורה חיים סימן רל"ב

107.



thinking about what we are saying. It means that if we think and take into ourselves the message of *Ashrei*, then we will then be deserving of *Olam Haba*.

### שמונה עשרה

- The שמונה עשרה of *mincha* is identical to the שמונה עשרה of *shachris*<sup>108</sup>. All the weekday *tefilos* of *shmoneh esrei* always have the same three sections: the first three *brachos* of praise, the middle section of requests, and the section with the last three *brachos* of thanks to *Hashem* for all his kindness.<sup>109</sup>
- There are two different types of *kavana*<sup>110</sup> that one should have when *davening*, especially during *shmoneh esrei*. *Kavana* is not easy to maintain. Even the *Rishonim* declared that *davening* with *kavana* is a difficult task. A person should train himself to keep his concentration, one piece of the *tefilah* at a time<sup>111</sup>.

### תפלת ערבית

- Ma'ariv consists of שמע and its ברכות before and after, followed by שמונה עשרה.
- There are two *brachos* before Sh'ma and two *brachos* after. A third *bracha* just before *Shmoneh Esrei* was added later.<sup>112</sup>
- In the *bracha* of מעריב ערבים we mention the creation of both night and day. The ancient זרה עבודה believed that there was one god in control of day, and another in control of the night. Therefore we declare that השם יתברך is in total control of both day and night, and everything else in the universe.
- The שמונה עשרה of *ma'ariv* is identical to the שמונה עשרה of *shachris* and *mincha*.<sup>113</sup>

### תפלות שבת ויום טוב

- Unlike the weekday *tefilos*, on *Shabbos* and *Yom Tov* we do not ask for our personal needs. On these special times we focus only on the holiness and special quality of the day. Therefore, the *Shmoneh Esrei* has only seven *brachos*, instead of the regular nineteen. As we have already said, the first three and last three *brachos* of *Shmoneh Esrei* are constant, throughout the year. They never change. It is only the middle section which varies. So instead of the thirteen *brachos* for our needs, we replace the entire middle

108. Those that doven נוסח אשכנזי insert שלום רב instead of שלום.

109. For more details, refer back to page 28 of this booklet.

110. On page 28 of this booklet, we wrote the following: One type is to realize that you stand before השם. You are actually talking directly to Him. The second type is to think about the meaning of the words you are saying. (We call this פירוש המלות).

111. I heard this idea from הרב הצדיק ר' יחזקאל לוינשטיין זצ"ל.

112. Not everyone recites this last *bracha*. In Eretz Yisroel, many congregations do not.

113. All *nuschaos* say שלום רב at night.

section with just one *bracha* which we call קדושת היום, which discusses the holiness of the particular day.

- The *bracha* of קדושת היום is very different on יום טוב than on שבת. On יום טוב we add ישראל to the ending of the *bracha*: מקדש ישראל והזמנים. On שבת we say מקדש השבת but don't mention ישראל. The גמרא explains the difference. The שבת was set forever from the time of Creation. True, we must keep the שבת, but we don't make the שבת come or go at all. It comes automatically every seven days, no matter what. However, יום טוב is different. It depends upon when the בית דין is מקדש the הודש, and also on whether בית דין has declared a leap year or not. Therefore we say that Hashem was מקדש the Jewish people, giving them the power to determine when יום טוב will fall.

For this reason, we say אתה בחרתנו in all the יום טוב *tefilos*. The עם ישראל are the special chosen nation of Hashem, and we thank Him for the great privilege of serving Him and rejoicing with Him on *Yamim Tovim*.

- On *Shabbos*, each of the three middle *brachos* of *shacharis*, *mincha* and *ma'ariv* differs from each other. The *Tur* teaches us that they correspond to three very special *Shabbosos*. On Friday night we recite ויכלו, as a reference to שבת בראשית. *Shabbos* morning we say ישמה משה to remind us of the *Shabbos* day when the Torah was given. At *mincha* we say לעתיד לבא to project ahead to the great *Shabbos* of לבא.

- On *Shabbos* and *Yom Tov* we add extra מזמורים in the דומרה. We don't say then on the weekdays, because we don't want to make the *davening* too long, since most people have to go to work.

## קידוש

- The Torah commands us זכור את יום השבת לקדשו. The word זכור means not only that we shouldn't forget, but that we must state with our words that *Shabbos* is a special holy day, set aside from the rest of the week. Reciting this over a cup of wine lends more significance to the mitzva. It is a מחלוקת whether the wine is also מן התורה or only מדרבנן.

- The עשרת הדברות are stated twice in the Torah, once in פרשת יתרו and again in פרשת פרשת. There are some differences between the two versions, but הז"ל tell us that they were both said together at the same exact moment. Hashem gave בני ישראל the ability to hear them both, something which a person can not normally do.

- In יתרו it says זכור את יום השבת לקדשו, and tells us that reason behind *Shabbos* is to remember that Hashem created the world in six days and stopped on the seventh. In פרשת, however, it says שמור את יום השבת לדשו, and tells us to keep *Shabbos* to remember that we were slaves in מצרים and Hashem redeemed us from there. These two statements were said בדבור אחד. That is what we say in לכה דודי, that השמיענו ק-ל, בדבור אחד. המיוחד.

## דעו לפני מי אתם עומדים

- The Gemora tells a story about R' Shimon bar Yochai and his son R' Elazar. After hiding from the Romans in a cave and learning Torah day and night for thirteen years, they were disappointed to see that most people spend so much time earning a livelihood. One Friday afternoon, they saw a Yid running in the street, holding two bundles of hadasim. When they asked him what the hadasim are for, he told them they are in honor of Shabbos. When they asked him why he needs two, he answered that one is for זכור and one is for שמור. R' shimon said to his son, "See, my son, even though they are busy working, they still show their love and affection for mitzvos."<sup>114</sup>
- When a couple is first married, the wife lights two Shabbos candles, one for זכור and one for שמור.
- Both of these ideas are stated in קידוש. We say זכרון למעשה בראשית and also זכר ליציאת מצרים.
- מצוה דרבנן is a יום טוב on קידוש, where we state our gratitude to Hashem for singling us out to give us these special times of rejoicing.

## קידוש לבנה

- Sunrise and sunset occur every single day. Since they happen constantly, we tend to take them for granted. We do mention them in the ברכה of יוצר המאורות in the morning, and המעריב ערבים in the evening, but somehow we don't feel sufficiently inspired from a sunrise or a sunset. The movements of the moon, however, follow a monthly cycle. At the end of the month, the moon is completely out of sight. When we can finally see a tiny sliver of the moon, we call this the מולד הלבנה, which literally means "the birth of the moon." Since the change over is much more noticable, we stand a much better chance of feeling inspired. We go outside to look at the moon, make this ברכה, and recognize Hashem's constant maintenance of nature.
- The Gemora says that when a person says קידוש לבנה, it is as if he is greeting the שכינה.
- The Jewish people follow a lunar calendar, which is based on the cycles of the moon. Just as the moon goes through its fazes every month, so, too, do the Jewish people constantly experience their ups and downs. Just as we know that when the moon disappears it will come back again, that is how certain we are that the *geula* will eventually become reality, with the arrival of *Moshiach*.

## ברכת המזון

- The *Torah* commanded us to say a blessing of thank you to Hashem after we eat a meal with bread, if we are full. This is one of the 613 *mitzvos*. If it was only a snack which did not fill us up, it is a *mitzva d'Rabonon*.

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שבת לג: 114.

## דעו לפני מי אתם עומדים

- *Hashem* lacks nothing, and has no need for us to thank Him, It is we who need to thank *Hashem* for what He does for us. Doing so will enable us to learn to have gratitude, and to come closer to *Hashem*.
- If we stop and think how much *Hashem* does for us, we will be so grateful that we will consider it a privilege to serve Him. *Bircas hamazon* is a perfect opportunity to think about this.
- We need to eat regularly in order to stay alive and healthy. If we realize that *Hashem* is the One that is providing us with all our food, *bentshing* will be a very inspiring time.
- Some people complain about things they don't have. They would like a new house, a bigger car or perhaps have a better job. If they would take a little time to realize how many favors they are already receiving from *Hashem*, they would never, ever complain.
- *Bircas hamazon* consists of four *brachos*, with some other additions after the fourth *bracha*.

### ברכת הזן

- The first *bracha* is simply a thank you to *Hashem* for feeding the whole world.

### ברכת הארץ

- The second *bracha* is a thank you for giving us *Eretz Yisroel*.

### ברכת בונה ירושלים

- The third *bracha* is a plea to restore *Yerushalayim* to its greatest, with the kings from the family of *Dovid Hamelech* ruling over the Jewish people. When we have said these first three *brachos*, we have fulfilled the *Torah mitzvah* of *bircas hamazon*.

### ברכת הטוב והמטיב

- The fourth *bracha*, which is a thank you to *Hashem* for all the good he does for us, was made later by the *Beis Din* of *Raban Gamliel*, in response to a special historical happening.
- All these *brachos* and the reasons for saying them, will each be explained, in its turn.

### רבותי נברך

- In the seventh chapter of *מסכת ברכות* we learn that when three men eat together there is an obligation for them to recite *ברכת המזון* together.
- The leader invites the others to join him in blessing *Hashem* for the food.
- It is a greater *kavod* for *Hashem* when people do a *mitzva* together.

- *Hashem Yisborach* needs no blessing from us. He lacks nothing, and there is really nothing we can give Him. When we say ברוך אתה, what we really mean is that *Hashem* is the source of all blessings.
- We have a rule that "ברב עם הדרת מלך". It is always a greater honor for a king when he is greeted or praised by a larger crowd. So, too, when we thank *Hashem* for what he has given us, it is a greater *mitzva* when we join together to do so.
- In times gone by, the person who led the *bentshing* actually said the whole *bentshing* for the others. They listened and said אמן after each *bracha*. However, nowadays we are afraid that some people may get distracted and not hear every word, hence not fulfilling the *mitzva* to *bentsh*. Therefore each person says the *bentshing* to himself, along with the leader.

### הזן את העולם

- The words of this first *bracha* were composed by *Moshe Rabeinu* when the *mann* began to fall. Just as everyone could see that the *mann* was from Heaven, so must we remember that the source of all food and livelihood is from the Creator.
- The ability of all creatures to eat is the result of many miracles. Each one has its own special set of tools to catch its food and escape its predators. The predators also have the tools to catch and eat their prey. Sometimes the victim escapes and sometimes gets eaten. That way a natural balance is kept, with no one creature increasing too much.
- Every creature on earth has something to eat. The food chain is one of the fantastic miracles of the natural world. Here is just one example of the food chain: There are tiny microscopic animals called plankton that multiply in certain places in the oceans at certain times of the year. At those times they are found in the billions. Herring and other fish eat the plankton. They know just how to find them, (without the aid of a GPS). Those fish come in the hundreds of millions. Larger animals such as dolphins, sharks and whales come from thousands of kilometers away to feast on the herring. The bottom line is that most of the herring get eaten, but enough survive to reproduce another generation of herring.
- The raven (crow) is a cruel bird. It is one of the only species that does not feed its young. How do the young survive? The *Ribono shel Olam* has taken care of this. The raven leaves its dung in the nest. When the baby ravens hatch, they eat the worms that live in the dung. This is what *Dovid Hamelech* says in תהלים: "He gives the animal its food, the children of the ravens who call out (to Him)."
- Human beings are at the top of the food chain. They eat the large animals, use their skins and utilize them for work. For thousands of years, animals pulled wagons and did

most of the farm work. Man is the crown of Creation, the ultimate purpose of everything. Everything else was made for his use, directly or indirectly, in one way or the other.

### בחן בהסד וברחמים

- Imagine if all food grew on trees in the form of tasteless vitamin pills. We would have no choice but to eat them in order to live. But *Hashem* feeds us with tremendous kindness. He has supplied us with an endless variety of delicious foods. We never have to get bored with what we eat, because there are more and more choices. Just as an example, there are 7,500 different types of apples in the world, and 10,000 different types of grapes. This is a sign of *Hashem's* graciousness to us: He wants us to enjoy the bounty He has provided, not only to survive.
- Not only do we have a great variety of flavors, but we also have available all the different kinds of nutrients to keep us healthy. We get proteins from meat, fish, eggs and cheese. Starches come from grains, such as wheat in the bread we eat. Vegetables and fruits are also important parts of our diet. The Creator has provided us with a balanced and nutritious diet!
- All food produces more food. Plants give off their seeds to reproduce. Each and every one has some method of getting its seeds replanted. Animals and fish bear young. The supply never runs out. This is all part of the Creator's kindness to us.

### תמיד לא חסר לנו

- When we receive a benefit from someone who has done us many favors, we don't just thank for this one favor. Rather, we say, "Thank you for this, and for all you have done for me in the past." That is precisely what we are saying here. It's not just a thank you for this piece of bread or for the meal just eaten. Thank you, *Hashem*, for everything you have given me since the day I was born.

### ואל יחסר לנו

- We ask *Hashem* to continue showering us with all our needs in the future.

### בעבור שמו הגדול

- The purpose of life is to serve *Hashem*. We will turn our food into fuel for our bodies, so as to continue to do *Hashem's* will. When we eat with this in mind, our eating becomes a *mitzva* for which we will receive reward. This is called eating לשם שמים.

### הזן את הכל

- Every single creature on earth receives its sustenance from *Hashem*.

## גודה לך

- The words of this *bracha* were composed by *Yehoshua* when the Jewish people entered *Eretz Yisroel*. Just imagine! You are actually saying the same words that *Yidden* said over three thousand years ago.
- The *Torah* told us that when we thank *Hashem* after eating, we must thank Him for the good land He has given us. When people are wealthy, they very often tend to forget that the source of their wealth is from *Hashem*. They think they have been successful because they are smart businessmen. For this reason, right after the *mitzva* of *bircas hamazon*, the *Torah* warns us not to forget *Hashem* and to think that it is "my strength and the might of my hand that has made for me all this wealth."
- One of the reasons we have so many *mitzvos* that have to do with land is so we should remember that no matter how hard we work the land, it is really *Hashem* that is blessing us with success.
- In this second *bracha*, we thank *Hashem* for numerous things: the fertile land of *Eretz Yisroel* he gave our forefathers, that He took us out of *Mitzrayim*, the *mitzva* to make a *bris*, for the *Torah* He taught us, for the laws He commanded us, and finally for keeping us alive and giving us food constantly.

## ***Bris and Torah***

- We received the gift of *Eretz Yisroel* in the *z'chus* of two *mitzvos*: *Bris milah* and *Torah*. Therefore in the *bircas ha'aretz* we thank *Hashem* for giving us these two *mitzvos*.

## רחם נא

- The words of this *bracha* that ask for mercy on the Jewish people and on *Yerushalayim* were authored by *Dovid Hamelech* when he built *Yerushalayim*. When *Shlomo Hamelech* built the *Bais Hamikdash*, he added on the part asking for mercy on the "great and holy *Bais Hamikdash*". Of course, now in *galus* we ask *Hashem* to give us back *Yerushalayim* and the *Bais Hamikdash*.
- In the *Bais Hamikdash* stood the *shulchan* with the *lechem hapanim* on it. It was a symbol of *Hashem's* blessing of *parnasa* for the *Am Yisroel*. The *Bais Hamikdash* was actually a great cause of *bracha* to our people.
- Not only did the Jewish people benefit from the *Bais Hamikdash*, but even the non-Jewish nations as well. The *Gemora* tells us that if the gentiles had understood how good the *Bais Hamikdash* was for them, they would have protected it with a police force instead of destroying it.

- We usually do not say אמן after our own *bracha*. This is an exception, because we want to make a division between the first three *brachos*, which we must say *min Hatorah*, and the fourth *bracha*, which is only obligated *mid'rabonon*.

### הטוב והמטיב

- The *chachomim* added this *bracha* in the *bentshing* because of a very sad story. The *Yidden* fought very hard with the Romans for many years before the Romans finally destroyed the *Bais Hamikdash*. The Romans lost a lot of soldiers and spent a lot of money in that long war. After they won, they wanted revenge. They made very harsh decrees on the Jews who were living in *Eretz Yisroel*, and made life very difficult for them in every way. Finally, the *Yidden* could stand it no longer and they rebelled, under the leadership of *Bar Kochba*. At first, they drove the Romans out of *Eretz Yisroel*, but, town by town, the Romans regained control over the cities of *Eretz Yisroel*. Finally, *Bar Kochba's* men had to run away from *Yerushalayim*, and they held up in a fortified city named *Beitar*. Although it took a very long time to conquer, the Romans finally got into *Beitar*, and they made a terrible slaughter there. This is one of the five tragedies for which we fast on *Tish'a B'av*.

After the terrible slaughter, the Roman emperor did not allow the bodies to be buried. He owned a vineyard in the area of *Beitar* which was eighteen *mil* by eighteen *mil*. For spite, he had his soldiers take the bodies of the slain Jews of *Beitar* and stood them up, pressed together, to form a fence around the entire vineyard. There they stayed for many years until that emperor died. The new emperor abolished the old emperor's decree, and allowed the bodies to finally be buried.



There was a great miracle that happened here. The bodies did not decompose at all during that long period when they were not allowed to be buried. So the *Sanhedrin* in *Yavneh* added a *bracha* called הטוב והמטיב, the fourth blessing in the *bentshing*. הטוב that they didn't decompose, והמטיב that they were finally allowed to be buried.

### **The Ani Maamin Foundation**

- This project is just one facet of the activities of the Ani Maamin Foundation. Ani Maamin's goal is to spread *chizuk* in *emunah* in our *Torah* world to educators, parents and children alike. By creating audio and written materials that show how compelling our *emunah* really is, we hope to bring about a heightened awareness and clarity in *emunah* to *bonei Torah* everywhere.
- For further assistance or information please call 845 418 2122, contact us at [info@animamaamin.org](mailto:info@animamaamin.org) or visit our website at [www.animamaamin.org](http://www.animamaamin.org).