**Line-by-Line through the First Beracha**

The first Bracha sets the tone for the entire Shemoneh Esrei. A person who says the first Beracha with proper concentration gives the entire Amidah wings to fly, even if he loses concentration after that. If one didn’t concentrate for the first Bracha, according to the strict law one is obligated to return to the beginning. However, since there is no guarantee that he will do better the second time, we do not require him to go back.

The Talmud says that before we ask requests, we should first say praise. The first 3 blessings are praise, followed by 13 requests and another 3 of thanks. The commentaries observe that there are 18 praises in the first Bracha corresponding to the 18 brachos.

**Part 1- The 3 Pillars**

*Elokeinu V’elokei Avoseinu, Elokei Avraham, Elokei Yitzchak, V’Elokei Yaakov*

We begin by referring to Hashem as the God of Avraham, God of Yitzchak and God of Yaakov. Each one of the Avos embodied and brought into the world a different foundational attribute of Hashem. That is why we say *Elokei* for each one of the Avos.

These attributes are also the themes of the first 3 brachos. During the first 3 Brachos we are trying to ignite these channels of connection (shefa) with Hashem so that they will permeate our entire Tefillah. Those 3 attributes are...

*HaKel HaGadol, HaGibor and V’HaNorah*

The Gemara (Brachos 33b) says that these are the *only* 3 adjectives we are allowed to use to describe Hashem because they are the exact words that Moshe used (Devarim 10,17). Without this precedent, it would be audacious for us to assume we can come up with the proper words to praise Hashem sufficiently.

*Gadol* is referring to Hashem’s *Chessed.* *Gibor* is Hashem’s *Gevurah*. And *Norah* is Hashem’s *Tiferes*/*Emes.* These 3 attributes are also going to be the themes of the first 3 Brachos.

**Part 2- Levels of Hashem’s Chessed**

After introducing to us the three channels through which Hashem’s influence flows, the rest of the first Bracha focuses on Hashem’s Chesed. Each line is introducing another level of Hashem’s Chessed. One can describe the levels as follows:

1. The giver is showing pity on the recipient who is inferior, poorer and weaker than him.
2. The giver is trying to empower and build up the recipient to be someone greater.
3. The giver is personally invested in the cause of the recipient.
4. The giver is giving because of some merit that the person has or some family connection.
5. The giver has an intimate personal connection with the recipient.

These 5 levels are represented in the next 5 terms.

*Eil Elyon*- Hashem is referred to with this title in the Torah by *Malki Tzedek*, a.k.a. Shem, the son of Noach. At that point in history when the world was corrupt and there was no Torah, Hashem’s giving did not come from a place of relationship rather as a higher, powerful giving to a recipient that is lower than Him.

*Gomel Chasadim Tovim-* the word *gomel* as well as *chasadim tovim* are expressions of granting someone a kindness that would empower them to be independant in the future.

*V’Koneh Hakol-* Hashem isn’t just the Creator, he is the “acquirer”. By constantly investing in people he becomes an active partner in our destiny and wants to see his investment succeed. This the next level of giving because of the deep connection that comes about through investment in the cause.

*V’Zocher Chasdei Avos-* The numerical value of the word Zachor (remember) is 227. This is the same numerical value as the word Berachah which means to multiply. The kindness of our fathers refers to the chessed that they did for Hashem by embracing him. This is the level of giving because of a certain merit or family connection.

*U’ Mavee Goel Lvnai V’naihem L’maan Shemo B’Ahava-* Even when there is no Zchus Avos left. This is the deepest expression of connection that shows Hashem’s love for us. When you love someone so much, the giving is not just about them, but it is giving for the giver’s own sake.

This level of giving will endure anything and will be there all the way until the end, when Moshiach comes. Therefore we close this section by saying that Hashem is constantly (*U’mavee* is present tense) moving the wold closer and closer to Moshiach.

**Part 3- The Closing**

*Melech Ozer U’Moshia U’Magen-*

Once again, there are 3 levels of connection being revealed to us. “Helping us” as we do the work and struggle through this world. “Saving us” is a much close interaction as it suggests that when we are in a struggle and helpless, He comes and does all the work for us. “Protect us” is the highest level because when we realize at every moment that he is there, we don’t even need challenges to wake us and realize he is there, so we are “protected” from everything.

*Magen Avraham-*

The 1st Bracha ends with the words *Magen Avraham* since Avraham specifically was the one who embodied Chessed. Avraham was able to look at at a completely pagan and immoral world and see Godly potential. Hashem’s chessed is so great that even when we have no merit left Hashem will protect us and find new reasons to bestow his good on us.