**The Middle Brachos of Shemoneh Esrei**

The middle 13 Brachos (originally 12, with one added on later) correspond to the 13 Tribes (originally 12, with one added on later when the tribe of Yosef was split). Once we generate the flow of Bracha into the world, we “distribute” it to the different components of Creation, represented by the number 12.

The Gemara (Megillah 17B) shows how the authors of Shemoneh Esrei carefully ordered the Brachos based on different passages throughout Tanach. There are subtle hints and references throughout Shemoneh Esrei to these passages.

The basic structure of the middle brachos follows the following pattern:

* The first 6 focus on requests that affect our personal life; with the the first 3 address our spiritual needs and the next 3 our spiritual needs.
* The next 7 focus on requests that affect the Jewish people as a whole and addressing our dreams to fulfill our destiny; with the first 4 addressing our development as a nation and the final 3 focusing on rebuilding Hashem’s kingdom.

**Group 1- Personal Spiritual Needs**

**Ata Chonen**

***You grant knowledge upon man and teach mortals understanding. Grant us, from You, wisdom, understanding and knowledge. בא”י- who graciously bestows knowledge.***

The 4th Bracha is a request for the most essential quality to live a meaningful life: *Daas*. Daas is often translated as knowledge, but the knowledge that we are speaking about here is of the highest sort. It is clear consciousness and perception that comes from a direct connection with Hashem. It is the level of clarity that Adam had while in Eden which is why we say “*you grant Adam daas*”. We use the term “granting” is because this is something that flows directly from above. *Adam* means mankind, but it is also a reference to Adam HaRishon, the primordial man. Once we have that we can bring it down to the lower levels of *bina*, understanding, and *seichel*, intellect, both of which are mentioned in the Bracha.

**Hashiveinu Avinu**

***Cause us to return, our Father, to Your Torah; draw us near, our King, to Your service; and bring us back to You in whole-hearted repentance. בא”י who desires penitence.***

The 5th Bracha is request for a vibrant relationship with Hashem. After mankind fell from that highest level of consciousness mentioned previously, we lost that initial clarity. But we can get it back if we use the proper tools. Those are Torah study, *Avodah* (this includes prayer and Mitzvot) and *Teshuva* (repentance). Both this Bracha and the next uses both the terms *Avinu*, our father, and *Malkeinu,* our King. This reflects both the love and awe we are supposed to feel towards Hashem. So we being this Bracha with the word Hashiveinu, return us to that level with these tools.

**Selach Lanu**

***Pardon us, our Father, for we have sinned; forgive us, our King, for we have transgressed; for You are a good and forgiving G‑d. בא”י, gracious One who pardons abundantly.***

The 6th Bracha is a request for Hashem to respond to our Teshuva, Torah and Avodah and completely restore us to our original level. Every Mitzvah accomplishes 2 things: It elevates our Neshamas, and it builds a relationship with Hashem. So too, every sin has two negative effects: It damages our Neshamas and it hurts our relationship with Hashem. The Bracha asks Hashem to wipe clean (*Slach Lanu*) the negative effect of the damaging act (*Ki Chatanu*), as well as to forgive us (*Mechal lanu*) for damaging the relationship (*Ki Pashanu*). Once we have reclaimed our spiritual level, we are ready to ask Hashem for our physical needs.

**Group 2- Personal Physical Needs**

**Re’eh**

***O behold our affliction and wage our battle; redeem us speedily for the sake of Your Name, for You G‑d are the mighty redeemer. בא”י Redeemer of Israel.***

The 7th bracha asks Hashem to help us through our personal life challenges and help us find *geulah* (redemption) in all the personal exiles we encounter. This is the seventh bracha because seven is represents Shabbos and Shemitah, both of which gives us rest from the daily grind. Moshiach will also come at the end of a Shemittah.

**Rifa’einu**

***Heal us, O L-rd, and we will be healed; help us and we will be saved; for You are our praise. Grant complete cure and healing to all our wounds; for You, Almighty King, are a faithful and merciful healer. בא”י who heals the sick of His people Israel.***

The 8th Bracha focuses on health and healing. The first phrase of the Bracha is a quote from the Book of Yermiyahu (17,14) “Heal me, O Lord, then shall I be healed; help me, then I shall be helped, for You are my praise!”, which is talking about a spiritual healing. The Bracha then continues to say “bring us a healing for all of our ailments”, implying a physical healing. The bracha seems to be address every level of sickness whether it is spiritual, mental, emotional and physical. Refuah is connected to the number 8. 8 is the number of rising above nature. Bris milah is on the 8th day.

**Bareich Aleinu**

***Bless for us, L-rd our G‑d, this year and all of its produce for good; and bestow (winter: dew and rain for) blessing upon the face of the earth. Satisfy us from Your bounty and bless our year like other good years.בא”י who blesses the years.***

The 9th Bracha focuses on receiving sustenance. It speaks about produce, but included in this is whatever means we need to receive our sustenance. Additionally, we ask to “be satisfied from your goodness”. It is one thing to have what you need, but an even greater blessing is to be satisfied with what you have. Sustenance is connected to the number 9 because the 9th perek of tehillim (in our Tehillim’s we have it as the tenth) speaks about the poverty that the righteous experience and the wealth of the wicked.

**Group 3 & 4- The Dream of the Jewish Future: People and Homeland**

These blessings focus on the national dreams of the jewish nation unfolding in many steps:

1. The “great shofar” and the ingathering of Exiles
2. The re-establishment of law and order according according to Torah values
3. Downfall of our enemies
4. The rise in status of those who truly deserve it
5. The rebuilding of Yerushalayim as the ultimate capital of the world.
6. The re-establishment of Malchus Beis David, the Davidic dynasty
7. An unbreakable connection with Hashem and acceptance of our Tefilos

These Brachos also parallel the first set of Brachos, with the first set of Brachos speaking specifically about our personal needs and the second set following the same pattern for the Jewish nation as a hole:

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| **1st Set** | **2nd Set** | **Connected Theme** |
| #4- Atah Chonen | #10- Teka B’Shofar | Both Brachos ask Hashem to initiate and awaken in us a new level of awareness and connection. In #4 is the “gift of Daas”. In #10, it is the “Shofar Gadol.”  |
| #5- Hashivainu | #11- Hashiva  | Both Brachos ask Hashem to “Return” us to a time and place where Torah values determine our way of life.  |
| #6- Selach Lanu | #12- V’Lamalshinim#13- Al Hatzadikim | #6 asks Hashem to wipe clean our flaws so that we can attain the level of the Tzadik (as is indicated by the number 6). #12 and #13 asks Hashem to cut off all wickedness and raise up the Tzadikim.  |
| #7- Re’eh | #14- VLiyerushalayim | Both Brachos speak about redemption and creating for us an oasis that is free from our pain and Exile.  |
| #8- Refa’einu  | #15- Es Tzemach | Both Brachos ask for a salvation of some sort: one from physical sickness and the other from the spiritual sickness of being in Exile for too long.  |
| #9- Bareich Aleinu  | #16- Shema Koleinu | Both Brachos ask for Hashem to send his ultimate Bracha down to the world.  |

**Teka B’Shofar**

***Sound the great shofar for our freedom; raise a banner to gather our exiles, and bring us together from the four corners of the earth into our land. בא”י, who gathers the dispersed of His people Israel.***

The 10th Bracha is a request for the ingathering of the exiles. The concept of the *Shofar Gadol* is based on the Book of Yeshayahu: “*And it shall come to pass on that day, that a great shofar shall be sounded*”, when those gathered throughout the Exile *“shall bow to Hashem on the holy mount in Jerusalem.*” The *Shofar Gadol* is understood literally by some, but can also mean that it will known throughout the world that something great is happening. Additionally, some explain the *Shofar Gadol* to be the cries of the Jewish people which will finally reach their limits. This is the 10th Bracha because 10 is the number of community (as in 10 needed for a minyan).

**Hashiva Shofteinu**

***Restore our judges as in former times, and those who guide us as it was originally; remove from us sorrow and sighing, and reign over us, You alone, Hashem, with kindness and compassion, with righteousness and justice. בא”י, King who loves righteousness and justice.***

The 11th Bracha is a request to restore Jewish leaders who can guide us. In a world full of twisted values and lack of clarity without strong leadership, we yearn for a time when authentic Jewish values will be returned to the world. This is based on a verse of the book of Yeshayahu “*And I will restore your judges as at first and your counsellors as in the beginning*”. It is the 11th Bracha, corresponding to the 11 principles of conduct in Psalms (15:5).

**V’Lamalshinim**

***Let there be no hope for informers, and may all the wicked instantly perish; may all the enemies of Your people be speedily cut off; and may You swiftly uproot, break, crush and subdue the reign of wickedness speedily in our days. בא”י, who crushes enemies and subdues the wicked.***

The 12th bracha is a request for our enemies and those who slander us to perish. This Bracha was added during the time when the Jews lived under the Romans and were being faced with existential threats from both the Romans but also self-hating Jews. This situation will repeat itself before the final redemption. Today we are seeing a surge of animosity towards Israel and the Jewish people not only from our enemies but from world leaders and many anti-Israel movements; some of which that are even led by Jews. Although it was added later, this is an appropriate 12th blessing because 12 is the number of the Tribes and therefore represents the wholeness of the Jewish people which is compromised when there are slanderers and haters.

**Al HaTzidikm**

***Upon the righteous, upon the pious, upon the elders of Your people, the House of Israel, upon the remnant of their sages, upon the righteous converts and upon us, May Your compassion be aroused, Hashem. Grant reward to all who truly trust in Your Name, and place our lot among them; may we never be disgraced, for we have put our trust in You. בא”י, the support and security of the righteous.***

The 13th Bracha is a request for Hashem to show compassion to all the righteous Jews and, ultimately, to all of us. There are certain levels of connection to Hashem that we cannot access on our own. Through our relationship with Tzadikim and Chassidim, however, we have extra capacity to access those levels. The tzadikim has the power to turn Midas HaDin into Midas Harachamim. Additionally, we all have contained within us a hidden Tzadik as it says “*And your nation are all tzadikim*”. The power to turn Din into Rachamim is connected to the 42 letter name of Hashem so there are 42 words in this Beracha. This was originally the 12th blessing and, as previously mentioned, it is an appropriate number since 12 is the number of tribes and here we are discussing the leaders of Klal Yisroel.

**V’LiYerushalayim**

***Return in mercy to Jerusalem Your city and dwell therein as You have promised; speedily establish therein the throne of David Your servant, and rebuild it, soon in our days, as an everlasting edifice. בא”י, who rebuilds Jerusalem.***

The 14th Bracha is a request to rebuild Yerushalayim as a holy city fit for the times of Moshiach and dwelling place for the Shechina (Divine presence). This Bracha begins with an extra letter *vuv,* because the *vuv* is the letter of connection (it translates as “and”, and the word *vuv* means a hook), and Yerushalayim is the place that connects Heaven and Earth. We call this Yerushalayim “*Binyan Olam,* the eternal structure” because we are promised that this time around, it will never be destroyed. This Bracha was originally the 13th, an appropriate number to be discussing a time when the world will recognize the oneness of Hashem, since the numerical value of Echad is 13.

**Es Tzemach**

***Speedily cause the outgrowth of David Your servant to sprout forth, and increase his power by Your salvation, for we hope for Your salvation all day. בא”י, who causes the power of salvation to flourish.***

The 15th Bracha is a request for Moshiach and the reestablishment of the Davidic dynasty. It is based on the verse in Psalms (132:17) “*There I shall cause pride (Keren) to sprout forth for David.”* It is called sprouting because it will happen as a natural progressive process which develops gradually and slowly like the growth of the plant. Originally this was the 14th Bracha, just as the name David has the numerical value of 14 (ד=4. ו= 6. ד=4). After the addition, it is the 15th Bracha. This is suitable for both this Bracha and the next because the number 15 always represents steps of ascension (as in the 15 steps in the Beis HaMikdash; Shlomo Hamemlech is 15 from Avraham.) The reestablishment of the Davidic dynasty is the ultimate destination of the Jewish people.

**Shema Koleinu**

***Hear our voice, Hashem Elokeinu, have compassion upon us and accept our prayers in mercy and favor, for You are G‑d who hears prayers and supplications; do not turn us away empty-handed from You, our King, for You hear the prayer of everyone. בא”י, who hears prayer.***

The 16th Bracha asks Hashem to hear our voices and listen to our prayers. The term “hearing a voice” is mentioned in the Torah regarding Avraham listening to Sarah’s words of prophecy. Our “voice” in this context is a reference to the deepest and purest part of our Neshama that is trying to connect to Hashem. The word *Tefillah* also does not just mean our words, but our deepest connection (from the word *Psil*, a thread). Additionally, the word Shema stands for Shacharis, Mincha, Arvis; meaning every moment. Therefore the Bracha’s ending Shomea Tefillah “who hears our prayers” has a deeper meaning to it as well” “Who is connected to us at every moment throughout the day”. This was originally the 15th blessing which, as we said, means it is the final destination. Everything that we have asked for up until this point has just been for the sake of being able to get to this spiritual level.