

Tefillah Focus Of The Week:

שמנה עשרה

Fighting Our Battles

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

And for slanderers let there be no hope; and may all the heretics perish in an instant; and may all the Your enemies be cut down speedily. May You speedily uproot, smash and cast down the evil doers—destroy them, lower them, humble them, speedily in our days. Blessed are You, Hashem, Who breaks enemies and humbles wanton sinners.

ולמלשינים אל תהי תקוה.  
וכל הרשעה כרגע תאבד.  
וכל אויבך מהרה יכרתו,  
והזדים מהרה תעקר  
ותשבד ותמגר  
ותכניע במהרה  
בימינו. ברוך אתה ה',  
שובר אויבים ומכניע זדים.

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

Who are the זדים? They are evil doers, the habitual and intentional sinners, who attempt to draw Jews away from their service of G-d (see Insight). We request that Hashem punish the זדים in no fewer than four different ways: He should “uproot, smash, cast down, and humble them,” תעקר ותשבד, (תמגר ותכניע). Rav Schwab (Rav Schwab on Prayer, ArtScroll, Page 479) explains that these four verbs were chosen very carefully and represent four different types of punishment:

Jews away from Judaism—either by force or persuasion—shall be uprooted and thereby shall cease to grow and develop.

- תשבד – We pray that evil-doers should be smashed into various factions, thus rendering them ineffective in reaching their evil objective.
- תמגר – We pray that even the factions of evil-doers be broken up—that they be further divided into individuals. Nevertheless, even without the strength of the group, these individuals are still dangerous.
- תכניע – We pray that Hashem humble the remaining individual evil-doers, so that individual זדים are rendered harmless.

- תעקר – We pray that Hashem uproot the evil doers, to prevent any future growth. It is our prayer that any ideology that attempts to take

**THEME:**

An essential concept of the prayer

Destroying the Destruction

We pray for the destruction of those who would destroy Israel spiritually or physically.

**INSIGHT:**

Deeper meanings of the theme

Beyond Repentance

This blessing was not part of the original Shemoneh Esrei, but was added by the Sages at a later time. The Rambam (Hilchos Tefillah 2:1), based on the Gemara (Berachos 28b), explains: “In the days of Rabban Gamliel, (who died twenty years before the destruction of the second Holy Temple in Jerusalem (70 CE)), the heretics increased in Israel. They distressed Israel and incited them to abandon G-d. When Rabban Gamliel saw that the need to be free of the heretics was great, he and his *bais din* (court) arose and established a blessing which would contain a request of G-d to destroy the heretics.” So great was the urgency to deal with the potential spiritual contamination of the Jewish people that the word מהרה, speedily, is found three times in this blessing (Praise, My Soul, Rabbi Avigdor Miller, Page 416).

Why do we pray for the sinners’ destruction instead of praying for them to repent? The latter prayer would be in accordance with the Gemara (Berachos 10a) in which Rabbi Meir’s wife Bruria implored him to pray that the people who were ignorant of the Torah and careless of its laws (Rashi, *ibid*) should not die, but rather, that Hashem should inspire them to repent. Rabbi Meir followed his wife’s advice and they repented.

Indeed, if someone sins and has no desire to influence others to sin, then we should pray for him to repent (i.e. by meeting righteous individuals who may help him develop a fear of G-d). However, when a sinner’s goal is to cause others to sin, as was the situation with the heretics in the days of Rabban Gamliel, we must pray for their demise (Rivavos Ephraim 3:591, Megadim Chadashim, Berachos 10a).

**VISUALIZE:**

Images that bring the prayer to life

Taking Proper Care

In the center of the garden was a giant oak tree. It was the focal point of the landscape, with great, leafy branches stretching out in all directions. Encasing the entire tree was a wreath of ivy, which was rooted in the ground and climbed a spiral path upward along the thick trunk. The ivy lived on the tree, but it did not weaken it. The gardener let the ivy grow, cutting it back occasionally to keep it in check.

On the other hand, there were caterpillars that wove nests



in the tree each spring. From those nests emerged moths that ate the leaves and caused a blight which could, if left unchecked, destroy the entire, massive tree. The gardener diligently sprayed the tree with a chemical that kept the caterpillars away. If he noticed that nests were appearing, he immediately would apply a more deadly chemical to wipe out whatever colonies were being formed.

Like the oak tree in this allegory, the Jewish people are Hashem’s mighty planting in the center of the world. We are surrounded by people and ideologies that are different from our beliefs, but as long as they are content to leave our integrity intact, we have no reason to pray for their destruction. However, when they act as a blight upon us, spreading their tentacles and sapping our strength, there is no time to lose. This blessing teaches us that we must pray for the destruction of anything that would, Heaven forbid, attempt to incite Hashem’s people to abandon His Torah.

**Try This!**

► In the discussion of the origins of this prayer (Insight, above) we learn that Rabbi Gamliel was deeply disturbed to observe the spread of heretical beliefs among the Jewish people. Today, we are pained to see too many of our own children drawn away from Torah and mitzvos by the beliefs of the surrounding society. When you say this blessing in Shemoneh Esrei, think of the desperate need for Hashem to defeat those who lure away the neshamos of these straying children.

**Did You Know**

► More on Personal Prayers

As we have discussed, there are several places throughout the *Shemoneh Esrei* in which one may insert personal requests: in each of the middle blessings, in the *berachah* of *Shema Koleinu* or in *Elokai Netzor*. We have previously discussed the salient laws with regard to inserting personal requests in each of the middle blessings or in the *berachah* of *Shema Koleinu*. We will now discuss inserting personal requests in *Elokai Netzor*.

The Gemara (*Berachos* 17a) tells us that the *Elokai Netzor* prayer was the personal prayer of Mar, the son of Ravina. The Tz’lach (*Ibid*) explains that *Elokai Netzor* was added at the end of *Shemoneh Esrei* to dismiss any notion that *Shemoneh Esrei* is recited in a forced or perfunctory way. Thus, *Elokai Netzor* serves as a place for one to add personal requests to *Shemoneh Esrei*. More of the halachos will follow, BE”H, in the coming weeks.