

# Afterthoughts

- Yocheved Bienenfeld

## ATA CHONEIN...

L'ADAM DA'AT - You grace humanity with knowledge...

As I learned many years ago, the weekday Shemoneh Esrei is divided into clear sections: the first three blessings are of praise, the next 13 are requests and the final three, thanksgiving. As Rambam teaches (Hilchot Tefilla 1:4): SH'MONEH ESREI B'RACHOT AL HASEDER: SHALOSH RISHONOT SHEVACH LASHEM, V'SHALOSH ACHARONOT HODAYA, V'EMTZA'YOT YEISH BAHEN SH'ELAT KOL HADEVARIM... - there are 18 blessings in the following order: the first three are praise of HaShem, and the last three are thanking; and the middle ones contain within them, requests of all things...

Within the section of requests, there are also subdivisions: the first six are more personal ones, while the remaining seven are national ones. Of the first six, the first four fall into the category of spiritual requests while the last two are of a material nature. Despite there being various sections, I usually found a theme that connected them. For example, the request for health begins with the words R'FA'EINU V'NEIRAFEI, HOSHI'EINU V'NIVASHEI'A - heal us

and we will be healed, save us and we shall be saved, which seem to state the obvious - that if You heal us, we will be healed, etc. But as Rav Shimon Schwab points out (Rav Schwab on Prayer p.455), these first words refer to a healing of the soul - that if this occurs, if we do teshuva (which is what the previous requests deal with), then we can request and be blessed with health. Thus, these opening words connect with the previous spiritual requests and then proceed with the material ones.

Similarly, the first of the national requests is the one to gather all the exiles to return to Israel. In essence, this connects to the previous personal requests by taking us, as individuals, and bringing us back to be a part of a nation in Israel.

The last of the requests, which asks Gd to hear and accept our prayer also connects to the next section since that section begins with a request that Gd accept the prayers of all the nation and return the service to the Beit HaMikdash.

What took me a long time to notice, however, was the connection between the first three blessings of praise and the first of the requests - that for knowledge. This connection should have struck me right away, for this blessing differs from all the other requests - but it didn't. It is the only one that opens stating something

about Gd's powers: ATA CHONEIN L'ADAM DA'AT - You grace humanity with knowledge. This "preface" isn't found in any other request. In essence then, stating that Gd grants knowledge, is basically a form of praise, describing what Gd does and is, as in the first blessings - the ones of praise. As such, since this blessing contains both praise of Gd and then segues into our request, it serves as a transition from the first section to the second. I am now able to see the whole Shemoneh Esrei as one unit, with each part flowing from one to the other.

Isn't unity a great thing? 🌸