



TEFILLA

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וְלַמְלִשְׁיָנִים

We're all familiar with riddles like:

*Who was the father of Yehoshua bin Nun?
How many days did the Six Day War last?
What color is the White House?*

Riddles whose answers are completely obvious if one stops to think for more than one second. One might think we could add onto the list the following question:

How many Brachot are there in the Shemoneh Esrei?

But the funny thing is – the answer is actually not 18!

Despite the name Shemoneh Esrei (which means 18), there are actually 19 blessings found in the Shemoneh Esrei. The reason for this is that an additional bracha was added into the Shemoneh Esrei during the time of Rabban Gamliel (after the destruction of the 2nd Beit Hamikdash) many years after it was composed by the Anshei Knesset Hagedolah (Men of the Great Assembly). That extra bracha is *ולמלשינים*.

וְלַמְלִשְׁיָנִים אֵל תְּהִי תַקוּנָה, וְכָל הַרְשָׁעָה כְּרַגְעָה תֵאבֵד וְכָל אוֹיְבֵיךָ מִהֲרָה יִכְרְתוּ, וְהַזֹּדִים מִהֲרָה תַעֲקֹר וְתִשְׁבֵּר וְתִמְגַּר וְתִכְנִיעַ בְּמַהֲרָה בְּיָמֵינוּ. בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה', שׁוֹבֵר אוֹיְבִים וּמְכַנְיֵי יְדִידִים.

Let there be no hope for informers, and may

all evil instantaneously disappear. May all of your enemies quickly be destroyed and may all intentional transgressors be uprooted, destroyed, crushed, and subdued quickly in our days. Blessed are You Hashem, who destroys enemies and subdues intentional transgressors.

The **Rambam** (Hilchot Tefilla 2:1) writes that during the days of Rabban Gamliel, there were many, many heretics among the Jewish people who were constantly bothering and attacking other Jews. They tried to convince them to turn away from Hashem and also slandered them to the non-Jewish rulers of the time. Since Rabban Gamliel saw that this was the greatest problem of the time, he decided to add in another bracha to request that Hashem rid them of all the heretics.

Why was this request so important that it merited to be added to the Shemoneh Esrei? The answer is that it was (and continues to be) a dire issue. When there are people who not only do the wrong thing but constantly try to convince others to go along with them, it is a very dangerous situation. In every generation, starting from the *ערב רב* in the times of the Midbar till the evil influences of the street today, there is always a group reaching out and trying to pull our children and ourselves to join them in their lifestyle. As the Rambam puts it – *שהצרה הזאת גדולה ורובה מכל הצרות*

– this affliction is greater than all of the other afflictions that we encounter. **Rabbi Moshe ben Machir** in his book סדר היום writes that even though the מלשינים (the slanderers) of those times are no longer, סוף הברכה, נשארה במקומה כי לעולם לא נמנע מן העולם מעכב על ידינו – *the bracha ultimately remains in place because in every generation, we will always have other groups of people preventing us from properly performing our Avodat Hashem.*

The **Gemara in Brachot (28b)** and **Sanhedrin (11a)** describe how the bracha was composed. According to the Gemara, Rabban Gamliel called out to the Chachamim: – *who can possibly compose this important bracha against the heretics?* The Gemara relates how finally one day a **בית קול** (Divine voice) descended in Yavneh and announced there was one man worthy of having the Shechina rest on him and writing this bracha, and that man was Shmuel haKatan.

On first glance, one might think – what’s the big deal about writing a bracha? Anyone who is talented at writing should be able to write a simple paragraph. Why was Rabban Gamliel having a difficult time finding the perfect candidate? This can be answered on two levels.

Firstly, we need to understand the depth and intricacy of the text of the Shemoneh Esrei. As mentioned above, the Shemoneh Esrei was written by the Anshei Knesset HaGedolah, men the likes of Ezra, Chagai, Zechariah, and Malachi. The **Nefesh HaChaim** explains that there is such inner depth to the Tefilla that we barely scratch



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the surface in our understanding of the words of davening. The words were written with Nevuah or Ruach HaKodesh and are embedded with secret meanings that make the words relevant for every single generation. Every single letter and word was carefully selected, as they have the power to make a deep impact in Shamayim. The **Pnei Yehoshua** explains that this is the reason why Rabban Gamliel had to go on a search for the appropriate author – writing part of the Tefilla is a monumental task, and only Shmuel HaKatan was found worthy in his entire generation.

Secondly, there was an additional requirement necessary for the author of this specific bracha. We read in **Pirkei Avot (4:1)** that Shmuel haKatan made the following statement. בנפול אויבך אל תשמח ובכשלו - אל יגל לבך - *when your enemy falls, do not be happy and when he stumbles, your heart should not rejoice*. Although this is not an original statement, but an exact quote from Mishlei, it is presented as his statement because for Shmuel HaKatan, not to rejoice when our enemies fail was one of the most important values to convey to

the next generation. At first glance, this seems almost hypocritical. How can someone who preaches peace and tolerance towards our enemies then go ahead and write a tefilla begging Hashem to destroy and crush them? But **Rav Yitzchak Hutner** writes that it is specifically because of this value that he preached that Shmuel HaKatan was the one most equipped to write the bracha of ולתלשיניים. Rav Hutner explains: רק מי שבאמת בוכה ומצטער על הצורך לבקש את רעתם, - *only one who truly cries and is in pain over the fact that we need to request that the Reshaim be punished, is worthy to compose this bracha*.

We can see from here that our outlook on this issue must maintain a very delicate balance. On one hand, it is absolutely necessary to daven to Hashem to purge the evil influences around us, but on the other hand, when He does so, we cannot rejoice in the destruction of Hashem's creations.

We hope and pray for the day when the forces of evil will be removed from the world and all obstacles to serving Hashem will be overturned! ■

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