



## HKB”H Promised Avraham Avinu that We Would Utter in our Tefilah: “The G-d of Avraham, the G-d of Yitzchak and the G-d of Yaakov

In relation to this week’s parsha, parshas Lech Lecha, it is fitting that we examine the first berachah of Shemoneh Esreh. Thrice daily—in Shacharis, Minchah and Arvis—in the tefilos established by our sacred Avos, we pronounce the formula: “ברוך אתה ה' אלקינו ואלקי אבותינו, אלקי אברהם אלקי יצחק ואלקי יעקב”—**Blessed are You, Hashem, our G-d and the G-d of our forefathers—G-d of Avraham, G-d of Yitzchak and G-d of Yaakov.** We conclude the berachah: “ברוך אתה ה' מגן אברהם”—**Blessed are You, Hashem, Shield of Avraham.**

The source for this exalted formula is found in this week’s parsha. When HKB”H first reveals Himself to Avraham Avinu, HKB”H presents him with the first of ten tests and makes him a promise. Here are the pertinent pesukim (Bereishis 12, 1):

“וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל אַבְרָם, לֵךְ לְךָ מֵאֶרֶץ וּמְוֹלָדֹתֶיךָ וּמִבֵּית אֲבִיךָ אֶל הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אֲרָא, וְאֶעֱשֶׂךָ לְגוֹי גָּדוֹל וְאֲבָרְכְךָ וְאֲגַדְלֶה שְׁמֶךָ וְהָיָה בְרַכָּה.”

Hashem said to Avram, “Go for yourself from your land, from your birthplace, and from your father’s house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation; I will bless you, and I will make your name great, and you will be a berachah.” In his second explanation, Rashi comments: “And I will make of you a great nation”: This refers to that which they say in Shemoneh Esreh, “G-d of Avraham”; “and I will bless you”—this refers to that which they say “God of Yitzchak”; “and I will make your name great”—this refers to that which they say “G-d of Yaakov.” One might think that they would conclude the berachah with all of them. We are taught otherwise; for the passuk says: “and you will be a berachah,” which implies that they will conclude the berachah with you (Avraham) and not with them.

Thus, we learn a tremendous chiddush. The members of the Great Assembly—Anshei Kenesses HaGedolah—instituted the mention of the first promise HKB”H made to Avraham in the first berachah of every Shemoneh Esreh. A logical explanation is that it is vital to invoke the merit of the Avos prior to praying to Hashem for all of our needs. Hence, we recall the first promise HKB”H made to Avraham Avinu: “**And I will make of you a great nation; I will bless you, and I will make your name great, and you will be a berachah**”—implying that his descendants would mention the three sacred Avos: “**G-d of Avraham, G-d of Yitzchak and G-d of Yaakov**” and conclude the berachah with Avraham’s name—“**the Shield of Avraham.**”

This coincides fantastically with what our early sources teach us. They write that the first three Berachos correspond to the three Avos respectively; accordingly, the first berachah of Shemoneh Esreh corresponds to Avraham. The source for this notion appears in the Shiblei HaLeket (Tefilah 18):

When Avraham was saved from the ordeal in Ur Kasdim, the ministering angels proclaimed, “Blessed are You, Hashem, the Shield of Avraham.” When Yitzchak Avinu was bound atop the mizbeiach and turned into dust, his ashes were cast over Har HaMoriah. Immediately, HKB”H covered him with dew and brought him back to life . . . Immediately, the ministering angels proclaimed, “Blessed are You, Hashem, Who resurrects the dead.” When Yaakov Avinu came and encountered the gates of heaven and sanctified the name of HKB”H, the ministering angels immediately proclaimed, “Blessed are You, Hashem, the holy G-d.”

Thus, it behooves us to explain this promise HKB”H made to Avraham Avinu—that his descendants would mention the names of the three Avos in their daily prayers, but they would conclude the berachah with his name alone. Why was it so important that the berachah conclude with his name alone? After all, Avraham Avinu was extremely humble, as evident from his declaration to HKB”H (ibid. 18, 27): “ואנכי עפר ואפר”—**though I am but earth and ashes.** He surely did not intend to seek personal honor.

### The Formula “אלקי אברהם אלקי יצחק ואלקי יעקב” Contains 26 Letters

We will begin to shed light on the subject by introducing what the Tzemach Tzedek (Lech Lecha), authored by the great Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Vizhnitz, zy”a, brings down in the name of the great Rabbi of Apta, zy”a. He questions why we mention the name Yaakov in the initial berachah of Shemoneh Esreh rather than the name Yisrael. After all, the Almighty tells him explicitly (ibid. 35, 10): “שמך יעקב לא יקרא שמך עוד יעקב כי אם”—“your name is Yaakov; your name shall no longer be called Yaakov, but rather Yisrael shall be your name.” And He called his name Yisrael.

In reality, we learn in the Gemara (Berachos 12b): “לא שיעקר”—not that the name Yaakov would be supplanted, but the name Yisrael would be primary and the name Yaakov would be secondary to it. Rashi comments: **We find that HKB”H continued to call him Yaakov afterwards—when he went down to Mitzrayim—as it says (ibid. 46, 2): “G-d said to Yisrael in a nighttime vision, ‘Yaakov, Yaakov.’ He responded, ‘Here I am.’”** Notwithstanding, we must endeavor to explain why we do not say “**the G-d of Yisrael,**” employing the primary name in the opening berachah of Shemoneh Esreh. Addressing this question, the Tzemach Tzedek explains that the phrase “אלקי אברהם אלקי יצחק ואלקי יעקב” contains precisely 26 letters, the numerical equivalent of the name **Havaya**, the name that represents divine mercy—“rachamim.” If, however, we said “ואלקי ישראל”—substituting the name Yisrael for Yaakov, there would be 27 letters, one more than desired.

He goes on to explain Rashi’s comment: **“And I will make your name great”—this refers to that which they say “G-d**

**of Yaakov.”** Seemingly, this does not make sense. How does informing Avraham **“I will make your name great”** (literally: I will enhance or enlarge your name) imply that his descendants will utter **“G-d of Yaakov”**? He explains that had HKB”H not changed and enhanced the name “אברם” to “אברהם”, with the addition of the letter **“hei,”** we could have said: **אלקי אברם אלקי**—since this phrase contains 26 letters.

However, seeing as HKB”H promised Avram that He would make his name greater—by adding a letter to his name and altering it to Avraham (as per Rashi’s first comment)—we are compelled to mention the name Yaakov instead of Yisrael in the berachah. Thus, Rashi’s comment makes perfect sense. **“And I will make your name great”—**in other words, I will add a letter to your name—compels us to say **“the G-d of Yaakov”** instead of **“the G-d of Yisrael,”** in order to maintain the count of 26 letters, corresponding to the name **Havaya**.

Based on this understanding, the Tzemach Tzedek interprets a passuk in this week’s Haftarah (Yeshayah 40, 27): **למה תאמר “יעקב ותדבר ישראל נסתרה דרכי מה”—why should you say Yaakov and speak Yisrael? My way has been concealed from Havaya.** The Navi is alluding to the question posed above. **למה “תאמר יעקב”—why do we say the name Yaakov in the berachah? “ותדבר ישראל”—**seemingly, it would be preferable to say **“the G-d of Yisrael.”** To which the Navi answers: **“My way is concealed from Havaya.”** In other words, if the name Yisrael were mentioned, the phrase would no longer allude to the name **Havaya**, because it would no longer contain 26 letters.

Concerning this matter, we find a precious gem in the sefer Rashei Besamim, authored by the esteemed Rabbi Yeshayah of Mushkat, ztz”l, on this week’s parsha. He also explains that we say **«אלקי אברהם אלקי יצחק ואלקי יעקב»**, because this phrase contains the exact same number of letters as the numerical equivalence of the holy name. He relies on this fact to provide a wonderful interpretation of the words of Yisrael’s sweet psalmist (Tehillim 124, 1): **“שיר המעלות לדוד לולי הוי”ה שהיה לנו יאמר נא ישראל: “Song of ascents of David. Had it not been for Havaya, Who was with us, let Yisrael declare now.** In other words, had it not been for the name Havaya, that equals 26, we would be saying **“ואלקי ישראל—the G-d of Yisrael.** (This elucidation also appears in the sefer Pardes Yosef in the name of the holy Rabbi Shimshon of Ostropoli, zy”a.)

## The Incredible Benefit of Mentioning the Name Havaya in Association with Yaakov

As a loyal servant in the presence of his master, we can suggest a valid rationale for alluding to the name **Havaya** with the utterance of the name Yaakov rather than the name Yisrael. In parshas Vayechi (Bereishis 47, 29), Rabeinu Bachayei explains at length that when the people of Yisrael exist on a lower spiritual level, they are referred to as **Yaakov**; in contrast, when they exist on a higher spiritual level, they are referred to as **Yisrael**.

With this in mind, he interprets the words of the Navi (Yeshayah 43, 22): "ולא אותי קראת יעקב כי יגעת בי ישראל"—**but you did not call Me Yaakov, because you wearied of Me, Yisrael.** He writes: "יאמר כשאתה יעקב ונמשך אחר החומר ועסקי הגוף, לא אותי קראת, לא אתה נקרא ישראל—אבל כי יגעת בי והשתדלת בעסקי הנפש, אתה נקרא ישראל—when you are on the level of Yaakov and are preoccupied with material and physical matters, you do not call upon Me; however, when you occupy yourselves with Me and engage in spiritual pursuits, you are referred to as Yisrael. The source for this notion is found in the Zohar hakadosh (Terumah 175b): "יעקב תתאה, ישראל עלאה יעקב לאו שלימותא, ישראל שלימותא דכלא"—**Yaakov is an inferior status; Yisrael is a superior status. Yaakov does not represent perfection; Yisrael represents the perfection of everything.**

This enlightens us as to why it is so vital to allude to the name **Havaya** with the mention of the name Yaakov. For, if we said in our tefilos: "אלקי אברהם אלקי יצחק ואלקי ישראל", it would imply that the tefilos of the congregation of Yisrael only deserve to be accepted by HKB"H when they are on the superior level of Yisrael; yet, if they are on the inferior level of Yisrael, they do not deserve to have their tefilos accepted. Hence, they established the formula of: "אלקי אברהם אלקי יצחק ואלקי יעקב"—which contains 26 letters—the gematria of the name **Havaya**—to indicate that even if they only possess the status of Yaakov, HKB"H accepts their tefilos due to the divine midah of "rachamim," emanating from the blessed name **Havaya**.

The explains very nicely the good tidings HKB"H brought to Avraham Avinu: **"And I will make of you a great nation": This refers to that which they say in Shemoneh Esreh, "G-d of Avraham"; "and I will bless you"—this refers to that which they say "God of Yitzchak"; "and I will make your name great"—this refers to that which they say "G-d of Yaakov."**

He was informing Avraham that even when his descendants will be lacking—when they have the status of Yaakov rather than Yisrael—nevertheless, HKB"H will still associate His name with them—"אלקי יעקב"—**the G-d of Yaakov**—and will show them the divine mercy of the name **Havaya**, alluded to by the 26 letters of the phrase: "אלקי אברהם אלקי יצחק ואלקי יעקב".

Based on what we have learned, we can now appreciate the following pronouncements HKB"H made to Moshe Rabeinu. At the revelation of the burning bush (Shemos 3, 6): "ויאמר אנכי אלקי—**And He said, "I am the G-d of your father, the G-d of Avraham, the G-d of Yitzchak, and the G-d of Yaakov."** Later on (ibid. 15): "כה תאמר אל בני ישראל ה' אלקי אבותיכם אלקי אברהם אלקי יצחק ואלקי יעקב שלחני אליכם"—**"So shall you say to Bnei Yisrael, 'Hashem the G-d of your forefathers, the G-d of Avraham, the G-d of Yitzchak and the G-d of Yaakov has sent me to you.'**" Then, when the staff was transformed into a serpent (ibid. 4, 5): "למען יאמינו כי נראה"—**so that they shall believe that that Hashem, the G-d of their forefathers, appeared to you, the G-d of Avraham, the G-d of Yitzchak, and the G-d of Yaakov.**

Let us elaborate. We know that Bnei Yisrael sunk to the 49<sup>th</sup> level of tumah in Mitzrayim. Accordingly, Moshe might have reckoned that they do not deserve to be taken out of Mitzrayim. In fact, he said to HKB"H (ibid. 3, 11): "מי אנכי כי אלך אל פרעה וכי אוציא"—**who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and that I should take Bnei Yisrael out of Mitzrayim?** Rashi explains Moshe's question as follows: **In what merit do Yisrael deserve to have a miracle performed on their behalf and that I should take them out of Mitzrayim?** Anticipating this question, HKB"H announces to Moshe that He is **"the G-d of Avraham, the G-d of Yitzchak and the G-d of Yaakov."** Thus, He informs him that even when the people are unworthy and as low as the human heel, even then, in the merit of the three Avos, He will have mercy on them via the name **Havaya**, alluded to by the 26 letters of this phrase.

This also explains very nicely David HaMelech's expression of gratitude to HKB"H: "לולי הויה שהיה לנו יאמר נא ישראל"—**"Had it not been for the midah of "rachamim" (divine mercy) emanating from the name Havaya"; "שהיה לנו"—modifying and ameliorating the name Elokim—whose gematria is לג"ו (86); "יאמר נא ישראל—Yaakov would have only been called by the name Yisrael—requiring that we be complete and perfect. Hence, David**

HaMelech continues: "לולי ה' שהיה לנו בקום עלינו אדם אזי חיים בלעוני—had it not been for Havaya, Who was with us when men rose against us; then they would have swallowed us alive, when their anger flared up against us." However, since HKB"H wished to treat Yisrael mercifully, even when they had the status of **Yaakov**; therefore, he alluded to the fact that He would continue to treat them with the midah of "rachamim" even when they were on that lower level. This is alluded to by the 26 letters of the phrase "אלקי אברהם אלקי יצחק ואלקי יעקב" corresponding to the name of "rachamim"—Havaya.

This provides us with a delightful interpretation of the formula instituted in the first berachah of Shemoneh Esreh: "וזוכר חסדי אבות ומביא גואל לבני בניהם למען שמו באהבה"—**Who recalls the kindnesses of the Avos and brings a redeemer to their children's children, for His name's sake, with love.** What is the connection between the geulah and the first berachah? Additionally, why is "for His name's sake, with love" mentioned here? To answer these questions, we will refer to the passuk (Shemos 17, 16): "ויאמר כי יד על כס י"ה מלחמה לה' בעמלק: מדור דור—and he said, "For there is a hand on the throne of י"ה (G-d); Hashem maintains a war against Amalek from generation to generation." Rashi explains the significance of the name י"ה in this passuk. It indicates that as long as Amalek exists, the name of G-d remains incomplete; the letters ו"ה are missing, leaving only the first two letters י"ה.

Thus, it turns out that if we mention the three Avos with the phrase "אלקי אברהם אלקי יצחק ואלקי יעקב"—containing the number of letters equivalent to the name **Havaya**—in our tefilos, we are in effect completing the name of Hashem with all four of its letters. Therefore, after uttering this phrase in the first berachah of Shemoneh Esreh, we say: **"And Who brings a redeemer to their children's children, for His name's sake, with love."** For, in the merit of mentioning the Avos with this 26-letter phrase, He brings a "go'el" (redeemer) for their descendants for the sake of His name **Havaya**.

### The Berachah Concludes with You "מגן אברהם" the Internal Focus in the Heart of Every Jew

Following this exalted line of reasoning, we will proceed to explain the conclusion of HKB"H's berachah and promise to Avraham: "והיה ברכה"—and you will be a berachah. Rashi comments: **We might have thought that the berachah would**

**conclude with the names of all of them** (Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov). **The passuk teaches us, however: "And you will be a berachah"—we conclude** (the berachah) **with you and not with them.** We expressed our bewilderment about this above; why was it so crucial to Avraham that Yisrael conclude the berachah with his name alone?

It appears that we can explain the matter with a brief introduction from the great luminary, the holy Ba'al Shem Tov, zy"a, that we have presented many times before. Every Jew, no matter who he is and his current situation—even a habitual sinner, chas v'shalom—possesses an internal focal point in his heart that is a divine spark. It is the root of the neshamah HKB"H implanted in every single Jew. It is impervious to sin and iniquity and remains pure and unblemished.

This is the rationale for Chazal's statement (Sanhedrin 44a): "ישראל אף על פי שחטא ישראל הוא"—**a Jew, although he has sinned, he is still a Jew.** Although he has sinned, this innermost, Jewish focal point remains unblemished within him. Therefore, his Jewish sanctity is preserved. This explains why we often see total reshaim inspired to perform teshuvah. It is this internal, unblemished focus that triggers their teshuvah. In the words of the sage: "רשעים מלאים חרטה"—**the wicked are full of remorse.**

In Sefer HaZakus (Sazria), the Chiddushei HaRim teaches us a tremendous chiddush. This internal, Jewish focus is a legacy from Avraham Avinu. He implanted it in every Jew until the end of time. With this in mind, he interprets HKB"H's pronouncement to Avraham (Bereishis 15, 1): "אל תירא אברם אנכי מגן לך"—**fear not, Avram, I am a shield for you!** Avraham feared that perhaps a Jew's internal focal point would become tarnished and blemished due to his transgressions; consequently, he would forfeit the status of Yisrael.

Therefore, HKB"H assured him that He would safeguard it and it would remain unblemished. We acknowledge this promise in the first berachah of Shemoneh Esreh: "ברוך אתה ה' מגן אברהם"—blessed are You, Hashem, Who safeguards the internal focus within every Jew, inherited from Avraham. For this reason: **"A Jew, although he has sinned, he is still a Jew."**

This enlightens us with regards to the connection between the two promises HKB"H promised Avraham Avinu: (1) **ואעשך לגוי גדול, זה שאומרים אלקי אברהם, ואברכך, זה שאומרים אלקי יצחק, ואגדלה יכול יהיו חותמין בכולן, תלמוד לומר (2) שמך, זה שאומרים אלקי יעקב** "והיה ברכה, בכך חותמין ולא בהם". We say **"the G-d of Yaakov"** and

not **“the G-d of Yisrael,”** because we conclude the berachah **“מגן אברהם”**. Thus, we express our gratitude to Hashem for safeguarding the internal focus that we inherited from Avraham. Therefore, HKB”H associates His name—**“the G-d of Yaakov”**—even with those Jews who are on the lower level associated with the name Yaakov, since they also possess a perfect, untainted internal focus.

This explains very nicely Rashi’s comment: **“And I will make your name great”—this refers to that which they say “G-d of Yaakov.”** The depiction **“G-d of Yaakov”** conveys the fact that HKB”H associates His name even with those who have the status of Yaakov. This expresses the greatness of Avraham, who bequeathed the internal focus that remains unblemished to every Jew. As a result, HKB”H associates His name even with those who have the status of Yaakov.

### **“Who Brings a Redeemer to Their Descendants”**

I would like to share a wonderful idea with you! Based on what we have learned, we can now explain why when they formulated the first berachah of Shemoneh Esreh—corresponding to Avraham Avinu—they included the phrase **“וזוכר חסדי אבות ומביא גואל לבני בניהם למען שמו באהבה”**. We’ve already explained that in the merit of uttering these 26 letters that mention the names of the Avos, we complete the sacred name of four letters that will be revealed at the time of the future geulah.

Furthermore, we will explain the significance of the conclusion of the berachah: **“ברוך אתה ה' מגן אברהם”**. Our holy sefarim (such as the Divrei Yisrael and Ohel Torah) address Rashi’s comment: **“יכול יהיו חותמין בכולן, תלמוד לומר והיה ברכה, כך”**—that it is evident from the passuk that only Avraham is to be mentioned here and not the other two Avos. Their explanation relies on the teaching in the Mishnah (Avos 1, 2): **“על שלשה דברים העולם עומד, על התורה ועל העבודה ועל גמילות”**—**the world stands on three pillars—on the Torah, on religious service and on the performance of acts of kindness.** The Zohar explains (Vayeitzei 146b): **Yaakov is the pillar of Torah—he studied Hashem’s Torah day and night. Yitzchak is the pillar of religious service—he was placed on the mizbeiach as a korban at the ordeal of the akeidah. Avraham is the pillar of acts of kindness—he went to great lengths and personal sacrifice to welcome guests into his home.**

Rashi comments that we might have thought that the conclusion should include all three of them--**“יכול יהיו חותמין בכולן”**. In other words, that the conclusion of galus would come about in the merit of the midos of all three Avos—the pillar of Torah, the pillar of religious service and the pillar of acts of kindness. Yet, the passuk informs us: **“והיה ברכה”**—indicating that the ultimate berachah, the conclusion of galus, will come primarily on account of your (Avraham’s) midah, the acts of chesed that Yisrael will perform. This is the gist of their sacred insight.

Accordingly, it is obvious why the first berachah, corresponding to Avraham, whose midah was chesed, incorporates the formula: **“Who recalls the kindnesses of the Avos and brings a redeemer to their children’s children, for His name’s sake, with love”**—and concludes: **“Blessed are You, Hashem, the shield of Avraham.”** For, as we have learned, the conclusion of galus will come about primarily in the merit of Avraham’s midah—the performance of acts of kindness. This explains very nicely why HKB”H said to Avraham: **“והיה ברכה”**—**the conclusion is on your account, not theirs.**

### **Avraham’s Departure from Charan to Eretz Yisrael Represents Yisrael’s Ultimate Departure from Galus**

We will now add a fascinating tidbit concerning the mention of the geulah in this first berachah corresponding to Avraham. We will refer to the commentary of the Ramban on the passuk (Bereishis 12, 6):

**“ויעבור אברם בארץ עד מקום שכם, ואמר לך כלל תבין אותו ככל הפרשיות הבאות בענין אברהם יצחק ויעקב, והוא ענין גדול, הזכירוהו רבותינו בדרך קצרה, ואמרו כל מזה שאירע לאבות סימן לבנים, ולכן יארכו הכתובים בספור המסעות וחפירת הבארות ושאר המקרים, ויחשוב החושב בהם כאלו הם דברים מיותרים אין בהם תועלת, וכולם באים ללמד על העתיד.”**

Here the Ramban introduces a basic principle, based on the Midrash Tanchuma (Lech Lecha 9), that plays a vital role throughout the parshiyos involving Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov. The events experienced by the Avos foretell future events that their descendants will experience—stated succinctly—**“ma’aseh Avos siman la’banim.”** It is for this reason that the Torah chronicles their journeys, the digging of the wells and all the other incidents. They all foretell future events.

Thus, it should be clear to us that everything that Avraham experienced relates to future events that his descendants would experience and endure. That being the case, it applies to the pronouncement HKB”H made to Avraham at their initial encounter: **“Go for yourself from your land, from your birthplace, and from your father’s house to the land that I will show you.”** His departure from “chutz la’aretz” to Eretz Yisrael foretells the departure of Yisrael from galus and their ascent to Eretz Yisrael. Avraham’s act was a sign for his descendants—“ma’aseh Avos siman la’banim”—it represents a preparation for the final, complete geulah.

Therefore, HKB”H promised Avraham: **“And I will make of you a great nation; I will bless you, and I will make your name great, and you will be a berachah.”** As we mentioned above, Rashi comments: **“And I will make of you a great nation”**: This refers to that which they say in Shemoneh

Esreh, **“G-d of Avraham”**; **“and I will bless you”**—this refers to that which they say **“God of Yitzchak”**; **“and I will make your name great”**—this refers to that which they say **“G-d of Yaakov.”** For, in the merit of mentioning the Avos with this 26-word formula, we hasten the arrival of the geulah—when the name of Hashem will be complete. Hence, Rashi adds: **One might think that they would conclude the berachah with all of them. We are taught otherwise; for the passuk says: “and you be a berachah,” which implies that they will conclude the berachah with you (Avraham) and not with them.** As explained, the conclusion of the galus will come in the merit of Avraham Avinu, whose midah is “gemilus chasadim” (the performance of acts of kindness). Therefore, HKB”H instructed him to depart Charan and head for Eretz Yisrael to perform a symbolic gesture related to the complete geulah, which will occur promptly, in our times! Amen.

Our thanks and blessings are given to those who donated for the publication of our weekly dvar Torah for the merit of **אחינו בני ישראל**

Family Madeb for the  
Refuah Shelimah of Lea bat Virgini

Arthur & Randi Luxenberg לזכות  
of their wonderfull parents, children and grandson

Sapir and Daniel Ohebshalom for the Hatzlacha and Zechut of their children,  
Yosef Elkanah and Ezra, as well as for the entire Ohebshalom, Aryeh and Ben Basat Families

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