

**Gemara** The Mishnah states that the daily Prayer contains eighteen blessings. The Gemara inquires as to the significance of this number:  
הני שמונה עשרה בְּנֵגֶד מִי – These eighteen blessings, to what do they correspond?

The Gemara answers:  
אָמַר רַבִּי הִלֵּל בְּרִיהַ דְּרַבִּי שְׁמוּאֵל בַּר נַחֲמָנִי – R' Hillel the son of R' Shmuel bar Nachmani said: בְּנֵגֶד שְׁמוֹנֶה עָשָׂר אַזְכָּרוֹת שֶׁאָמַר – They correspond to the eighteen mentions of God's Name that David said in the psalm: *Render unto Hashem, you sons of the powerful.*<sup>[32]</sup> רַב יוֹסֵף אָמַר – Rav Yosef said: בְּנֵגֶד שְׁמוֹנֶה עָשָׂר אַזְכָּרוֹת שֶׁבִקְרִיאַת שְׁמֵךְ – Corresponding to the eighteen mentions of God's Name in the reading of the *Shema*.<sup>[33]</sup> אָמַר רַבִּי תַנְחוּם בֶּן לֵוִי – R' Tanchum said in the name of R' Yehoshua ben Levi: בְּנֵגֶד שְׁמוֹנֶה עָשָׂר חוּלְיוֹת שֶׁבַשְׂרָרָה – Corresponding to the eighteen vertebrae in the spine.<sup>[34]</sup>

During Prayer, one is required to bow at specific places.<sup>[35]</sup> The Gemara discusses how far down a person is obligated to bow:  
וְאָמַר רַבִּי תַנְחוּם בֶּן לֵוִי – And R' Tanchum said in the name of R' Yehoshua ben Levi: הַמֵּתְפַלֵּל צָרִיךְ שִׁיכָרַע – One who prays must bow – עד שִׁיתְפַּקְקוּ כָּל חוּלְיוֹת שֶׁבַשְׂרָרָה – until all the vertebrae of the spine protrude.<sup>[36]</sup> עוּלָא אָמַר – Ulla said: עַד כְּדֵי שִׁירְאָה אִיסָר בְּנֵגֶד לְבוֹ – Until he is able to see an *isar* of flesh opposite his heart.<sup>[37]</sup> רַבִּי חַנִּינָא אָמַר – R' Chanina said: בֵּינָן שְׂנֵעֵנֶה רֵאשׁוֹ שׁוֹב אֵינוֹ צָרִיךְ – Once he bows his head, he need not do any more. אָמַר רַבָּא – Rava said: וְהוּא דְמַצְעֵר נִפְשִׁיהּ – And this applies only where he is in pain, וּמַחֲזִי כְּמֵאֵן דְּכָרַע – and he appears like one who wishes to bow.<sup>[38]</sup>

The Mishnah stated that the weekday Prayer is made up of eighteen blessings. The Gemara asks:  
הֲנֵי תַמְנִי סְרֵי תִשְׁרִי הַוּוּיִן – These eighteen are actually

nineteen!<sup>[39]</sup> – ? –

The Gemara answers:  
בְּרַבְתַּי הָעֲדוּקִים בִּבְנֵה תַקְנוּהָ – Said R' Levi: – The blessing of the heretics was established later on in Yavneh.<sup>[40]</sup>  
The Gemara inquires:  
בְּנֵגֶד מִי תַקְנוּהָ – Corresponding to what was it established?

The Gemara answers:  
לְרַבִּי הִלֵּל בְּרִיהַ דְּרַבִּי שְׁמוּאֵל בַּר נַחֲמָנִי – R' Levi said: – According to R' Hillel the son of R' Shmuel bar Nachmani who said above that the eighteen blessings correspond to the eighteen mentions of God's Name in the psalm: *Render unto Hashem, you sons of the powerful*, “אֶל-הַכְּבוֹד הַרְעִים” – this nineteenth blessing was established corresponding to the verse in that psalm: *the God of Glory thunders.*<sup>[41]</sup> לְרַב יוֹסֵף – According to Rav Yosef who said that the eighteen blessings correspond to the eighteen mentions of God's Name in the *Shema*, the nineteenth blessing was established corresponding to the word “One” in the reading of the *Shema*.<sup>[42]</sup> לְרַבִּי תַנְחוּם בֶּן לֵוִי – According to R' Tanchum in the name of R' Yehoshua ben Levi who said that the eighteen blessings correspond to the eighteen vertebrae of the spine, the nineteenth blessing was established בְּנֵגֶד חוּלְיַי אֶטְנָה – corresponding to the small vertebra of the spine.<sup>[43]</sup>

The Gemara elaborates on the history of the nineteenth blessing:

שִׁמְעוֹן הַפְּקוּלִי – The Rabbis taught in a Baraisa: תְּנוּ רַבָּנִין – The Rabbis taught in a Baraisa: תְּנוּ רַבָּנִין – הַסְדִּיר שְׁמוֹנֶה עָשָׂר בְּרִכּוֹת לְפָנָי רַבִּן גַּמְלִיאֵל עַל הַסְדֵּר בִּיבְנֵה – SHIMON THE COTTON MERCHANT ARRANGED THE EIGHTEEN BLESSINGS IN ORDER BEFORE RABBAN GAMLIEL IN YAVNEH.<sup>[44]</sup> רַבָּנִין גַּמְלִיאֵל אָמַר – RABBAN GAMLIEL SAID TO THE SAGES: – כְּלוּם יֵשׁ אִדָּם שִׁוִּיעַ לְתַקְּנָה בְּרַבְתַּי הָעֲדוּקִים – IS THERE ANYONE WHO KNOWS HOW TO ESTABLISH (i.e. formulate) A BLESSING OF, i.e. against, THE HERETICS?<sup>[45]</sup> עַמְד שְׁמוּאֵל הַקָּטָן

#### NOTES

32. Psalm 29:1. As explained by the Gemara in *Rosh Hashanah* 32a, the first three phrases of this psalm contain allusions to the first three blessings of the *Shemoneh Esrei* (*Rashi*). R' Hillel states that the total number of blessings in the *Shemoneh Esrei* also has its roots here, in the eighteen times the Tetragrammaton (YKVK) appears in this psalm.

33. Eleven mentions of the Tetragrammaton and seven mentions of a form of the word אֱלֹהִים. [The word אֱלֹהִים in the phrase אֱלֹהִים אֱתָרִים is, of course, not counted, because it refers to idols.]

34. [The upper portion of the human spinal column contains seven cervical (neck) vertebrae, twelve dorsal (back) vertebrae and five lumbar (loin) vertebrae. In stating the total number of vertebrae in the spine, the Rabbis apparently referred only to those below the neck. This accounts for seventeen vertebrae. The identity of the eighteenth vertebra mentioned here is unclear (see *Biblical and Talmudic Medicine* by Dr. Julius Preuss, p. 65).] See *Oholos* 1:8.

35. The Gemara below (34a) details which these are.

36. And his body is bent into the shape of a bow (*Rambam, Hil. Tefillah* 5:12).

37. When one bows, two folds of flesh are formed [opposite the heart], one above and one below. One must stoop so far that the flesh in between these folds is the size of an *isar* coin (*Rashi*; cf. *Rashi* as quoted by *Rabbeinu Yonah*, end of chapter 5 שִׁתְפַקְקוּ 5 (ר"ה ער שִׁתְפַקְקוּ 5). [As to the size of this coin, see *Nekudas HaKesef* to *Yoreh Deah* 34:2 and *Sefer Middos V'Shiurei Torah* 9:20-22.]

Others explain the phrase, “until he is able to see an *isar* of flesh opposite his heart,” to mean that if an *isar* coin is lying on the ground near his feet and opposite his heart, he should be able to see it when bowing. The intention is that it is insufficient for him to merely bend his body at his waist while holding his head erect. Rather, he must bow his head as well (*Rashba* here in the name of *Rav Hai Gaon*). See *Meiri*.

38. If he is sick or old (*Tos. HaRosh*) and bowing all the way causes him obvious discomfort, then it is sufficient if he merely bows his head. Young, healthy people, however, must bow the full amount.

39. A count of the blessings shows that there are in fact nineteen blessings in the *Shemoneh Esrei*.

40. Originally only eighteen blessings were composed. At a later date, however, a nineteenth blessing, לְמַלְשֵׁימַי, was added by Rabban Gamliel, in response to the threats of heretical Jewish sects.

The text found in the Vilna Shas, which reads “the blessing of the Sadducees,” is the product of censorship. In earlier prints this benediction is entitled בְּרַבְתַּי הָעֲדוּקִים, “the blessing of the heretics” (*Dikdukei Soferim*); our translation follows this text.

41. *Psalms* 29:3. Originally no blessing was formulated corresponding to this name because אֵל is not the Tetragrammaton (*Tos. HaRosh*).

42. This is a reference to the verse: *Hear, O Israel, Hashem is our God, Hashem is One* (*Deuteronomy* 6:4). Since the word *One* is a reference to God, it also counts as a mention of God's Name (see *Maharsha*).

43. [*Aruch* (ערך לוֹ ג) identifies this as the *luz* bone, to which the Sages attribute extraordinary properties (see *Bereishis Rabbah* 28:3; see also *Megadim Chadashim* here).]

44. The blessings of the *Shemoneh Esrei* follow a set order that is derived from Scriptural sources, as the Gemara in *Megillah* (17b,18a) sets forth (see *Rashi* to *Megillah* 17b על הַסְדֵּר 17b). This order was arranged by Ezra and the Men of the Great Assembly. Over the years, however, the order was forgotten. Shimon the Cotton Merchant reinstated this order (see *Ritva*; cf. *Rabbeinu Yonah* and *Doros HaRishonim* volume 3 pp. 144-7).

45. I.e. the sectarians (see note 40).

