

### The First and Second B'rakhot

The 20th-century talmudist Joseph B. Soloveitchik notes that the first two blessings of the Amidah evoke distinctly different ways of relating to the Divine. In the first blessing (*Avot/Our Ancestors*), we see ourselves as heirs. We address God with the dignity and confidence—as well as responsibility—of a covenantal partner. God blessed our ancestors and will continue to bless us, for we inherit what they wrought. In the second blessing, our situation is radically altered: we experience our human vulnerability and our dependence on God; we call upon God for help. Our service to God emerges from both ways of deliberating on the human condition—our own inner sense of dignity and confidence, and the consciousness of our vulnerability and finitude—often experienced at the same time.

#### With Patriarchs:

You are the sovereign who helps and saves and shields.

† *Barukh atah ADONAI*, Shield of Abraham.

#### Second B'rakhah: God's Saving Care

You are ever mighty, ADONAI—  
You give life to the dead—  
great is Your saving power:

*From Sh'mini Atzeret until Pesah:*

You cause the wind to blow and the rain to fall,

*[From Pesah until Sh'mini Atzeret, some add:*

*You cause the dew to fall,]*

You sustain the living through kindness and love,  
and with great mercy give life to the dead,  
You support the falling, heal the sick,  
loosen the chains of the bound,  
and keep faith with those who sleep in the dust.  
Who is like You, Almighty,  
and who can be compared to You?  
The sovereign who brings death and life  
and causes redemption to flourish.

*M'khalkel hayim b'hesed,  
m'hayeih meitim b'rahimim rabim,  
somekh noflim v'rofei holim u-matir asurim,  
u-m'kayem emunato lisheinei afar.  
Mi khamokha ba'al g'vurot umi domeh lakh,  
melekh meimit u-m'hayeh u-matzmiah y'shuah.*

*On Shabbat Shuvah we add:*

Who is like You, source of compassion,  
who remembers with compassion Your creatures for life?

You are faithful in bringing life to the dead.  
*Barukh atah ADONAI*, who gives life to the dead.

*When the Amidah is recited silently, continue on page 188a with "Holy are You."*

#### With Patriarchs and Matriarchs:

You are the sovereign who helps and guards, saves and shields.

† *Barukh atah ADONAI*, Shield of Abraham and Guardian of Sarah.

#### With Patriarchs and Matriarchs:

מְלַךְ עוֹזֵר וּפּוֹקֵד  
וּמוֹשִׁיעַ וּמַגֵּן.  
† בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה,  
מְגִן אַבְרָהָם וּפּוֹקֵד שָׂרָה.

#### With Patriarchs:

מְלַךְ עוֹזֵר וּמוֹשִׁיעַ וּמַגֵּן.  
† בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה,  
מְגִן אַבְרָהָם.

אַתָּה גִבּוֹר לְעוֹלָם אֲדֹנָי,  
מַחִיָּה מֵתִים אַתָּה,  
רַב לְהוֹשִׁיעַ.

*From Sh'mini Atzeret until Pesah:* מוֹשִׁיב הַרוּחַ וּמוֹרִיד הַגֶּשֶׁם,  
[*From Pesah until Sh'mini Atzeret, some add:* מוֹרִיד הַטֶּל,]

מְכַלְכֵּל חַיִּים בְּחַסֵּד,  
מַחִיָּה מֵתִים בְּרַחֲמִים רַבִּים,  
סוֹמֵךְ נוֹפְלִים, וְרוֹפֵא חוֹלִים, וּמַתִּיר אֲסוּרִים,  
וּמְקַיֵּם אֲמוּנָתוֹ לִישְׁנֵי עֶפֶר.  
מִי כְמוֹךָ בַּעַל גְּבוּרוֹת וּמִי דוֹמֵה לָךְ,  
מְלַךְ מֵמִית וּמַחֲיֶה וּמַצְמִיחַ יְשׁוּעָה.

*On Shabbat Shuvah we add:*

מִי כְמוֹךָ אֵב הַרְחָמִים, זוֹכֵר יְצוּרָיו לְחַיִּים בְּרַחֲמִים.  
וְנֶאֱמָן אַתָּה לְהַחְיֹת מֵתִים.  
בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה, מַחֲיֶה הַמֵּתִים.

*When the Amidah is recited silently, continue on page 188a with אַתָּה קְדוֹשׁ.*

**SHIELD OF ABRAHAM** מְגִן אַבְרָהָם. After Genesis 15:1.

**GUARDIAN OF SARAH** וּפּוֹקֵד שָׂרָה. After Genesis 21:1.

**YOU ARE MIGHTY** אַתָּה גִבּוֹר. This second *b'rakhah* describes God's presence and activity in the world, centering on God's kindness and care for the vulnerable and powerless. It first describes God as nurturing all of life, then more specifically as concerned with injustice. The *b'rakhah* concludes with mention of the dead, for even they—the most powerless—are in God's care.

**GIVE LIFE TO THE DEAD** מַחֲיֶה מֵתִים. To be sure, the primary use of this phrase was in reference to the afterlife, but the rabbis of the Talmud also understood it to refer to a spiritual revival in this world. Thus, the *b'rakhah* recited upon greeting a friend whom one has not seen for a year utilizes this phrase, "who gives life to the dead" (Babylonian Talmud, Berakhot 58b). Similarly, Hasidic texts speak of reviving the parts of ourselves that have lost their vitality, as bringing life to that which has been deadened.

**SHABBAT SHUVAH.** On the Shabbat between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, we add prayers asking that we may be granted a good and long life.