

THE FIFTH BLESSING: BREAKING DOWN BARRIERS

by Rabbi Daniel Travis

"Bring us back, our Father, to Your Torah, and bring us near, our King, to Your service, and influence us to return in perfect repentance before You. Blessed are You, Hashem, Who desires repentance."

Even if we had the wisdom to know exactly what to ask for, there still exist many obstacles that could prevent us from receiving what we need. Our Sages tell us that the greatest obstacles to the acceptance of our prayers are transgressions, which create a barrier between us and Hashem and block the flow of His bounty. In the fifth blessing of Shemoneh Esrei, we ask Hashem to help us repent so that we may receive all the gifts that He wishes to bestow upon us.

The fifth blessing, Hashivenu, contains three requests. We ask Hashem to bring us back to His Torah, to draw us close to His service, and to return us in complete repentance. However, we conclude the blessing by mentioning only repentance.

This same pattern is common to many of the other blessings of Shemoneh Esrei. We start with three requests and conclude with only one. What is the significance of this model?

Before we can return to Hashem, we must first come back to His Torah and His service. Only through immersion in Torah and His service can we overcome the temptations for transgression and begin to tear down the barriers between us and our Maker that we have created through our wrongdoings. Therefore, we preface our main request for repentance with a plea to draw closer to Torah and His service.

In all of those blessings based on this model, the first two things are essential prerequisites for the fulfillment of our primary, final request.

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