

THE TENTH BLESSING: RETURN

by Rabbi Daniel Travis

"Sound the great shofar for our freedom, raise the banner to gather our exiles and gather us together from the four corners of the earth. Blessed are You, Hashem, Who gathers in the dispersed of His people Israel."

In the ideal vision, all the Jewish people are living in the Land of Israel. The tenth blessing of Shemoneh Esrei asks Hashem for the fulfillment of this aspect. Since this process will be heralded by the blast of a shofar, we mention this at the start of this blessing (Tur 118).

Some versions of this blessing add the word "meheira," quickly, while some omit it (Shaarei Teshuva 118,1). Ashkenazim usually omit it, while other versions include it. Both wordings are halachically acceptable.

Some halachic authorities suggest a special reason to add the word quickly to this blessing. Hashem has already promised us that he will gather in all the Jews from exile, a process that we have seen beginning in our own times, so we do not need to ask for this. However, we do need to beg Hashem to fulfill this promise quickly and soon, and without the difficulties that our Sages say may accompany it (Leket HaKemach HaChadash 118,4, based on the Chasam Sofer).

Those who omit the word quickly from this blessing can rely on an alternative explanation. Although the ingathering of exiles has been promised, we fear that it will come with a terrible price of infighting and divisiveness among the Jewish people. We therefore ask that we should be gathered "together," and that the Jewish people should be unified in this process.

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