

Pray and Mean It is an occasional listserv. Its aim is to build an understanding of and connection to Jewish prayer step by step. It is administered through googlegroups. (Your inclusion in this group is confidential. I am the only person who has access to the names and e-mail addresses on the list.) People who wish to be added to the listserv may visit the googlegroups site or e-mail me at CantorJC@aol.com. All postings can be viewed with clear legible Hebrew at my synagogue's website, www.tiferethisrael.org You are welcome to share this with others who might find it interesting or valuable. Recipients will NOT be able to respond to the entire list, but may correspond with me.

Thanks and best wishes – Cantor Jack Chomsky, Congregation Tifereth Israel, Columbus Ohio

Pray and Mean It 16

This is the 16th installment in this series.

We have just recited blessings about our personal health (*R'faeinu*) and the health of our planet (*Barech Aleinu*). we now turn our attention to the status of our people.

T'ka b'shofar gadol l'cherutenu

תִּקַּע בְּשׁוֹפָר גָּדוֹל לְחֵרוּתֵנוּ

V'sa neis l'kabetz galuyoteinu

וְשָׂא נֵס לְקַבֵּץ גְּלוּיֹתֵינוּ

V'kabtzenu yachad meiarba kanfot ha-aretz

וְקַבְּצֵנוּ יַחַד מֵאַרְבַּע כַּנְפוֹת הָאָרֶץ.

Baruch Atah Adonai

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה'

M'kabetz nidchei amo yisrael.

מְקַבֵּץ נִדְחֵי עַמּוֹ יִשְׂרָאֵל.

Sound the Great Shofar for our freedom,
And raise high the banner to gather our exiled.
And gather us together from the four corners of the earth.
Praised are You Adonai,
Who gathers the dispersed of (His) people Israel.

This brief passage has profound implications geographically across the entire world AND temporally -- across the Jewish calendar.

It's one of those payoffs that regular schulgoers get on the high holidays. Before I was a regular davener, I had no idea that the dramatic phrase that we recite toward the end of Musaph, starting the Shofrot section of that service, was an everyday thing. Conversely, I didn't have the satisfaction of getting a little bit of Rosh Hashanah every weekday of the year through this cross-reference.

On one level, then, just as newspapers will tell you "how many shopping days to Christmas," the recitation of this phrase referring to the Shofar serves as a daily reminder of where we are in the course of the year relative to Rosh Hashanah. (This may give you more pleasure than it gives me. Contemplating Rosh Hashanah means contemplating a huge list of things that need to be accomplished!)

But the reference to Shofar strikes me as incidental. I relate to this paragraph of the Amidah much more on the basis of a call to Jewish unity. Gathering our people from the four corners of the earth gives me a pleasant image of the amazing ingathering of our people in the land of Israel -- Jews from every corner of

the world -- from Russia and other former Soviet Union countries, from South America, from North America, from South Africa, from Yemen, Syria and Egypt, from Ethiopia. . . from almost everywhere that there have ever been Jews.

The sad truth is that some of those people don't look on me in such a kindly way. There are ways that a Jew like me really struggles for my religious redemption in the land of Israel. The Orthodox establishment has thrown up many roadblocks holding back the Jewish lives of Masorti and Reform Jews in Israel. The *sadder* truth is that sometimes I feel enough anger about this to interfere with my sense of brotherhood with such fellow Jews. I use this paragraph as a reminder that even though I may sometimes be treated as an outsider, I believe in the one-ness of our people -- and I will celebrate it even when others aren't prepared to.

Furthermore, the sense of gathering us together from disparate places is something I think about in other contexts -- when my family comes together to celebrate a simchah -- or a sad occasion -- and when a group of people with shared interests gathers in one place -- a USY Kinnus, a Cantors Assembly Convention, any national Jewish gathering. Each of these is a hint, a foretaste, of a greater ingathering.

If we are prepared to bless the lesser gathering, perhaps we are that much closer to the greater gathering.

It can also be nice to expand the meaning of the word *nes* in this text. It is understood that in this context the word means banner. Yet we also know the word *nes* means miracle (and we have noted the centrality of this concept to the *Modim* section in the Amidah). If we keep a sense of the miraculous even as we understand the word to mean banner in this context, the phrase in which it appears could be translated, "And raise high miraculously the banner to gather our exiled." Keeping a sense of the miraculous gathering of exiles that has been the basic history of the modern state of Israel -- and keeping a sense that it is sacred work and that we need to still pray for it and work for it -- helps make it a greater reality -- and gives possibility in the future for even greater miracles.

And of course we seek those miracles -- or tiny pieces of them -- each and every day and each time we raise our voices and our hearts in prayer.

If you wish to respond, you may e-mail me at CantorJC@aol.com.