**10. Gathering of the Exiles (Kibbutz Galuyot)**

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| תְּקַע בְּשׁופָר גָּדול לְחֵרוּתֵנוּ.  וְשא נֵס לְקַבֵּץ גָּלֻיּותֵינוּ.  וְקַבְּצֵנוּ יַחַד מֵאַרְבַּע כַּנְפות הָאָרֶץ.  בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה', מְקַבֵּץ נִדְחֵי עַמּו יִשרָאֵל: | Sound a great shofar blast for our freedom.  And lift up a banner for the gathering of our exiles.  And gather us together from the four corners of the earth.  Blessed are You, Adonai, who gathers the dispersed among his people Israel. |

The concept of a Jewish homeland in the land of Israel is one of the strongest concepts in the Jewish tradition. However, for Jews living outside of the land of Israel it has often been one of the most difficult, especially in times of peace where Jews are not being persecuted.

In the modern period there have been several attempts to change this prayer to reflect the values of Jews who respect Israel but do not wish to pray to return there. Read the following changes in the siddur and think about how they have changed the traditional version:

**1) Gates of Prayer (1975, a Reform siddur):**

Sound the great horn to proclaim freedom, inspire us to strive for the liberation of the oppressed, and let the song of liberty be heard in the four corners of the earth.

**2) Reconstructionist Daily Prayer Book (1996)**

Bring home the homeless of our People in peace from the four corners of the earth, and enable them to march upright into our Land.

**3) Conservative Weekday Prayer Book (1958, version used before Sim Shalom)**

**4) Sim Shalom (1989)**

Sound the great shofar to herald our freedom, raise high the banner to gather our exiles. Gather us together from the ends of the earth. Praised are You, Lord who gathers the dispersed of his people Israel.

How do these versions differ from the traditional version? How do they differ from each other? What do they say about Judaism in general?

**A Talmudic Debate Concerning the Land of Israel**

The following passage is from the Babylonian Talmud, a book written in Babylonia during the 2nd – 5th centuries C.E. This was a time in Jewish history when more and more Jews were moving away from the land of Israel and settling elsewhere. Babylonia was the center of world Jewry for around 600 years. It was probably the strongest Jewish diaspora in all of Jewish history. In comparison, America has been a strong center of world Jewry for no more than 100 years, perhaps even less. We can imagine how hard it must have been in these centuries for Jews making the difficult choice to leave the land of Israel.

What is interesting about this text is that it contains voices on both sides of the debate concerning whether a Jew must live in Israel. On the right side of this column I've put some of the statements that imply that living in Israel is the primary value in Judaism. On the left side I've put some that claim that there are other values such as the quality of Jewish life that are more important. In the footnotes there are questions to get you to think about what these texts are trying to teach. Imagine that instead of the question being whether to live in Babylonia or Israel, the question is whether to live in America or Israel. How do you understand these texts? How do you relate to them?

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| **Other values are more important than living in Israel** | **Living in the Land of Israel is the most important value in Judaism** |
| Rav Judah stated in the name of Shmuel: Just as it is forbidden to leave the Land of Israel for Babylonia so too it is forbidden to leave Babylon for other countries.[[1]](#footnote-1)  Rav Judah said: Whoever lives in Babylon is counted as if he lived in the Land of Israel.[[2]](#footnote-2)  R. Zera was evading Rav Judah because he desired to go up to the Land of Israel while Rav Judah had expressed [the following view:] Whoever goes up from Babylon to the Land of Israel transgresses a positive commandment.[[3]](#footnote-3) | Our Rabbis taught: One should always live in the Land of Israel, even in a town most of whose inhabitants are non-Jews,[[4]](#footnote-4) but let no one live outside the Land, even in a town most of whose inhabitants are Jews.[[5]](#footnote-5)  When R. Zera went up to the Land of Israel, he could not find a ferry to cross [a certain river]. He grasped a rope bridge and crossed. Thereupon a certain heretic (a Jew who didn’t believe in Judaism)[[6]](#footnote-6) sneered at him: ‘Hasty people, that put your mouths before your ears, you are still, as ever, clinging to your hastiness’[[7]](#footnote-7).  R. Zera replied: ‘The spot which Moses and Aaron were not worthy [of entering] who could assure me that I should be worthy [of entering]?’ |

1. Why does Rav Judah think it is forbidden to leave Eretz Yisrael? At the time this text was written, Babylonia was the center of Judaism. Why then would it be forbidden to leave Babylonia? [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Why? What does Babylonia have that makes it equivalent to Eretz Yisrael? [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Why do you think Rav Judah is so opposed to moving to the land of Israel? [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. What does this show concerning why one should live in Israel? What would a person’s life be like if he lived in Eretz Yisrael but he lived with only non-Jews? [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Why not—if everyone is Jewish why not live outside of the land of Israel? [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Why does the teller of this story say that a heretic was the first person to notice R. Zera arriving in Israel? What is the meaning of the fact that R. Zera, who always wanted to make Aliyah, is greeted by a heretic? [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. The reference here is to “we will do and we will hear” that the Israelites said before they received the Torah. They promised to keep the Torah before they heard its details. How is R. Zera similar to those people? What happened to the Israelites after they received the Torah? [↑](#footnote-ref-7)