



Kinder Torah

For parents to share with children at the Shabbos table



Avinu Malkeinu

It is now over two months since the passing of HaGaon HaRav Nachman Bulman zt"l. This piece describes his final Yom Kippur.

"Avinu Malkeinu chatanu lifanecha!" (Our Father Our King we have sinned before You).

These words mark the final phase of the *Neilah* service, the culmination of a 40 - day process. These *Yomim Noraim* (Days of Awe) are set aside for the Jewish people to do *tshuva* (correct our mistakes). Hashem will accept our *tshuva* at any time, but during these days He is especially close to us and will accept our *tshuva* immediately. Consequently, Jews try to motivate themselves to contemplate their mistakes, regret them, and correct their ways.

It begins on the first day of the month of Elul, with the blowing of the shofar, and the recitation of "LiDovid Hashem Uri" (Tehillim 27). That first shofar blast brings many people to tears, in anticipation of the approaching Day of Judgement. We know that the gates of tears are never locked, however, it is so difficult to cry. Our hearts are blocked; they have become cold and insensitive to our own failings.

Every day, another shofar blast. Return, return, oh wayward Jew! Correct your ways and come to Hashem. Yet, it is so difficult to truly arouse ourselves.

Then come the days of *selichos* (prayers for forgiveness). We meet in shul at midnight to cry out in unison to Him. We invoke the Thirteen Attributes of His Name, which are guaranteed to arouse His mercy. Still, the tears do not come. We do not see, we do not feel. One person is missing from the congregation this *selichos* night. The Rav himself, our beloved leader, has not been well lately. He usually leads these *selichos* prayers. A man who has guided Jewish congregations for half a century, he surely knows what Jewish suffering is. His voice, ringing out clear, beseeching Hashem, always brings us out of our shells. He is not here this night. We return to our homes with heavy hearts.

Each morning we rise early for *selichos*. We pray and beseech Hashem, hoping for more rays of inspiration. Then it is Rosh Hashanah, the Day of Judgment. It has arrived too soon. We are not prepared. We have not cried. How can we survive Hashem's

judgment? Our Rav will lead us in the prayers of the day. His tearful prayers, full of the warmth and feelings of decades will inspire us. Yes, he has joined us today, however he is too weak to lead the prayers.

We now have ten days to correct our ways, the "Aseres Yimai Tshuva". Ten days of attempting to introspect, to regret, and to change our ways. It is so difficult because we are so distracted. Each day we rise early for *selichos*. Again and again, we invoke the Thirteen Attributes. Please Hashem, have mercy upon us. Now especially, with the problems in the Holy Land, and the sick people in our neighborhood. We try to be on our best behavior. We know that every action is being judged. So much hangs in the balance. The tension is perceptible.

Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement arrives. Twenty-five hours of fasting, praying, and crying out to Hashem. Perhaps today we can break through. We confess our sins once, twice, three times. We beat our hearts. "Oshamnu, bogadnu, . . . Al Chet." We say these prayers over and over and over again. We try to relate to these sins. We try to regret them. *Tshuva* must be from the heart, not from the lips. The Rav is with us but he is again too weak to lead the prayers. We are grateful to be in his presence, and pray for his wellbeing. The day passes too quickly and we are at the end – the "Neilah" service. The gates are closing. Our fate is about to be sealed. This is the climax of the 40 days from Rosh Chodesh Elul until this moment. We know that the gates of tears are never closed. Please Hashem, make the tears come. It is almost over. The *chazzan* repeats the *Amida* prayer and says the *selichos*. Time is going. We have only one prayer left.

"Avinu Malkeinu chatanu lifanecha!" The words ring in our ears. The voice pierces our hearts. Can it be? This is not the voice of the regular *chazzan*. Our beloved Rav has ascended to lead the prayers. He is weak from the fasting and illness. He speaks barely in whispers. Yet now his voice rings out loud and clear.

"Avinu Malkeinu ain lonu melech ela atto!" The tears flow like rivers. Before we coaxed ourselves to moisten our eyes. Now we cannot stop the crying.

"Avinu Malkeinu assei imanu lima'an shimecho!" Who is making that voice so strong? The voice that could barely speak. Who is holding that

body so straight? The body that had to sit most of the day. It must be the Heavenly Angels.

"Avinu Malkeinu chadesh oleinu shona tovah!" He is speaking straight to Hashem. He is writing us all in the Book of Life and sealing it for us. The tears flow and flow. Every word pierces our hearts.

"Avinu Malkeinu battel meoleinu kol gezeros kashos!" This is the moment of inspiration that we have been searching for. This is the point of it all. This is true *tshuva*, crying out to Hashem with a broken heart.

"Avinu Malkeinu battel machshevos soneinu!" The Rav continues, slowly and deliberately. We realize that is a special moment in our lives, one that we will savor over and over again. One that we will relate to our grandchildren.

"Shema Yisroel . . ."

"Hashem Hu Ho'Elokim!"

The prayer ends. The *shofar* sounds. Our sins are forgiven. That joyful teary moment, when all of our pent-up tensions are released. Laughing, crying, happy, and sad all at once.

"Lishona Habo Bi'Yerushalaim!" We begin to sing together. We clap hands and begin to dance. Who is leading the dancing? The Rav. His face glows with the warmth of a father surrounded by his children and grandchildren.

"Lishona Habo Bi'Yerushalaim!" He dances around. His strength and energy grow. He has inspired us all, as he has done so many times in the past.

"Avinu Malkeinu" you have smiled upon us and given us a wonderful gift this Yom Kippur. The inspirational experience of a lifetime.

גמר חתימה טובה

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