As we approach the Days of Awe, it's important to review the prayers which loom so large over these solemn days. I'll begin this short survey of some of those prayers with a two-part piece on the longest silent devotion of our liturgical treasury. This Amida is not only massive it is also unique to our prayers, because it has nine blessings. All the other holiday and Shabbat Amidot have seven blessings; the regular opening and closing three, plus one describing the sanctity of the day. But not Rosh Hashanah Musaf. Now we must explore why.

First, it's clear that there are nine blessings because there are nine crucial ideas connected to the holiday that we call Rosh HaShana. These are MALCHIYOT, the kingship of God; ZICHRONOT, God's perfect recall of all events; and SHOFAROT, the centrality of the ram's horn to our commemoration. I fully intend to describe the significance of the latter two concepts in my next article, please, God, in a week.

Normally, the single central holiday B'RACHA is called KEDUSHAT HAYOM ('sanctity of the day'), and ends by declaring the reality that God sanctified the day (on Shabat) or sanctified the Jewish nation who sanctifies the special times (on Chag and Musaf of Rosh Chodesh). This same B'RACHA is, indeed, number four in our nine-blessing prayer, but with a slightly controversial twist.

'And one includes the blessing of Kingship, (containing the ten Biblical verses on that theme) in the blessing of the Sanctification of God's Name (HaKEIL HaKODOSH), and one does not sound the SHOFAR after it. Next, one adds a special blessing for the Sanctification of the Day (KEDUSHAT HAYOM), and sounds the SHOFAR after it... according to Rabbi Yochanan ben Nuri. Rabbi Akiva says to him: If one does not sound the SHOFAR for the blessing of Kingship, why does he mention it? Rather, one includes the blessing of Kingship in the blessing of HaKEIL HaKADOSH. Rabbi Akiva says that can't be because without the
sounding of the SHOFAR it can't be one of the essential ideas. The SHOFAR, as we'll see next week, must accompany the critical concepts of the day.

So, who do we follow? Well, sort of both, because we do change HaKEIL HaKADOSH to HaMELECH HaKADOSH, and we do begin the blessing of sanctification of the day with the words: MELECH AL KOL HA-ARETZ (King over the whole world).

Plus, we expand the normally short blessing of sanctification of God's Name to include three ideas, and each of those three ideas get expressed with three nouns. First trepidation with the words for awe (YIR'A), dread (EIMA) and fear (PACHAD); then glory with the words for honor (KAVOD), praise (T'HILA), and hope (TIKVA); and, finally, joy with the words for happiness (SIMCHA), exultation (ALIZA) and mirth (RINA).

These three emotional levels probably represent the progression of our state of mind throughout the High Holiday period. We begin Rosh HaShana with tremendous concern for our fate, acknowledging our misdeeds in the past year. However, as we progress, we begin to feel immense respect and reverence for our God, who cares for us. Finally, we experience the joy of the certain knowledge of our forgiveness before the Divine Throne.

Next, we come to the first of the three middle blessings, MALCHIYOT. The format of this blessings begins like every holiday Musaf. God, You chose us to perform this service before You. Unfortunately, the Beit HaMikdash was destroyed as a result of our sins and, therefore, we can't really bring the special offerings. Instead, we recite the verses containing the details of those offerings.

At that point, comes the big departure from the norm. Instead of just closing this section with a blessing about God sanctifying Yisrael and we sanctifying this holiday, there is a major detour to proclaim God as our Sovereign. The first change is the recitation of ALEINU (It is incumbent upon us). This famous prayer which we associate with ending prayer services was originally written for the Rosh HaShana Musaf.

This ancient prayer has two parts. The first declares our loyalty and fealty to the one true God in contradistinction to the rest of the world which bows to idols. The second inspiring paragraph envisions a future where idolatry has ended,
the world has been repaired and worship of the one true God is universal.

Then we recite ten verses from Tanach; three from Chumash, three from T'hillim, three from the Prophets, and a final verse from Chumash. The outstanding verses are, 'Then God will be King over the whole world, on that day God will be One and His name will be One (Zecharia 14:9), and, most famously, 'Hear O Yisrael, God is our Lord, God is One! (D'varim 6:4).'

Finally, we have a concluding paragraph which summarizes the glorious vision of a world totally under God's rule. Its salient point is the recognition that God is the Maker of all things and the Molder of all knowledge. We declare: Let everything with breath in its nostrils proclaim that God, Lord of Yisrael is King and His Kingship extends over everything.

We close with the dual blessing: Blessed are You, God, King over all the world, Who sanctifies Yisrael and this Day of Remembrance. Rav Steinzaltz zt"l, based on Chassidic thought, uses this dual idea to make a very profound point: The world which is created anew with the beginning of a new year, isn't an exact continuation from the previous year. There is a return to the primordial AYIN ('nothing')... There is a need to rebuild anew the relationship between God and the nascent Cosmos... (Also) kingship only exists when the King has someone over whom to rule. It doesn't exist in a vacuum... This reality exists between God and Yisrael, as the Midrash points out on the verse, 'You are My witnesses and I am God (Yeshayahu 43:12)'... On Rosh HaShana, Yisrael is not merely observers on the sidelines, rather we have a role in the creation of the renewed world (The Life of a Year, p. 30, my translation).

The majestic blessing of MALCHIYOT is a declaration of those ideas, and our commitment to contribute to their implementation.

Next week: ZICHRONOT (memories) and SHOFAROT (Shofar blasts). 🎉