

# **Walk thru Davening**

## *with Rabbi David Walk*

### **GOD IS KING!**

Rosh Hashana Musaf, pt 1

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 MALCHİYOT, 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 the Sanctification of the Day, and sounds the SHOFAR (Rosh Hashanah 4:5).

So, Rabbi Yochanan ben Nuri believes that the proclamation of God's kingship (with its Biblical verses) replaces the regular 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). 

## **Memories & Expectations**

### **Rosh Hashana Musaf, pt 2**

Last week I wrote about the third and fourth blessings of Musaf for Rosh HaShana. These two blessings emphasize the Kingship of God. This concept is core to the day's message and essence. But in the Torah this holiday is called ZICHRON T'RU'A ('a memorial of trumpet blasts' - Vayikra 23:24). So, this week we turn our attention to the fifth B'RACHA called

**ZICHRONOT and the sixth B'RACHA called SHOFAROT. These blessings directly describe the Torah's names for Rosh HaShana.**

**The format for those B'RACHOT follows the pattern set for MALCHIYOT. There is an introductory paragraph. Then we have ten verses (three from Torah, three from Tehillim, three from Nevi'im and a final verse from Torah), and, a concluding paragraph culminating in a B'RACHA.**

**In ZICHRONOT, something fascinating occurs. The feel or mood of the first paragraph is very different from the closing section. I'm sure that many of you, my dear readers, come into the High Holidays with anxiety, if not dread. The opening statements of ZICHRONOT feed that frenzy:**

**You remember all the deeds in the world, and You also visit the behavior of all creatures who lived in earlier times. In Your gaze all hidden things are revealed, including the multitude of secrets from the beginning of creation; for there is no forgetfulness before the Throne of Your Glory, and there is nothing hidden from Your eyes. You remember and note all that has been done, nothing is concealed from You. All is revealed and known before You, the misdeeds of man's actions, the thoughts of man and his**

**schemes.**

**Wow, talk about surveillance, and you were worried about the CCTV in your company's parking lot. Actually, it's easier for us to imagine that level of scrutiny than for our pre-modern forebears. But that doesn't make it any less daunting and creepy. Like signs outside public restrooms (WC's for my British brethren) warning that the premises are monitored. No one would want to see replays of our most embarrassing moments from the previous year, a highlight reel to be avoided. God is presented as Big Brother.**

**However, the final paragraph of this section is much more reassuring:**

**Our God and God of our forebears remember us favorably before You and be mindful of us for deliverance and compassion from the Eternal High Heavens. Remember on our behalf, Eternal our God, the covenant, the kindness and the oath which You swore to our father Avraham on Mount Moriah, so may Your compassion suppress Your anger against us... And fulfill for us Eternal, our God, the promise You made in Your Torah, through Your servant, Moshe: 'I will remember for them the covenant with their forefathers whom I took out of the land of Egypt.' Blessed are You, O**

**God, Who remembers the covenant.**

**Here we have a transition from PACHAD, fear or dread to KAVOD, respect and honor. We saw the triple list of emotions (fear, honor, joy) in the third blessing of KEDUSHA, last week. We've entered stage two, and feel much more comfortable with God's inability to forget.**

**Continuing that process forward, we come to the third leg of the middle B'RACHOT of Musaf: SHOFAROT. If MALCHIYOT brings PACHAD, fear, and ZICHRONOT delivers us to KAVOD, honor, then SHOFAROT must usher in SIMCHA, joy. And it does. The verses in this section are about the Shofar being sounded for redemption at Sinai, and to usher in the Messianic Era. But there's more going on with the Shofar.**

**In the Talmud we are told, 'Recite before Me on Rosh HaShana MALCHIYOT, ZICHRONOT and SHOFAROT. MALCHIYOT to enthrone Me over them, ZICHRONOT to bring their remembrances before Me for positive purpose. With what do we accomplish this task? Through the Shofar (Rosh HaShana 16 a).**

**The Shofar not only has its own message of Revelation and Divine intercession, it is also a means of communication. It heralds the**

**themes of Rosh HaShana. The Pachad Yitzchak suggests that we required a wind instrument for this role because Rosh HaShana is the anniversary of the creation of humanity. How was the first human created? 'And God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life' (B'reishit 2:7). It's no coincidence that the word for 'breath', NESHIMA, is almost identical to the word for 'soul', NESHAMA.**

**That heavy breathing or blowing into the Shofar is using the power granted through God's unique gift to humanity for the purpose of proclaiming the messages of the anniversary of that CPR event. The Shofar has its message but it also broadcasts the other themes of the day.**

**Finally, it's crucial to the understanding of the day that we note that there are two categories of SHOFAR. We have regular, garden variety SHOFAROT, but we also have SHOFAR GADOL, industrial strength SHOFAR. The normal SHOFAR has been sounded throughout history. But the Great Horn will be sounded on that day (BAYOM HAHU, Y'shayahu 27:13). The joy or good vibes engendered by the SHOFAR, not only brings us back to the wonderful memories of Divine Revelation in a glorious past, but also imagines a future, better Revelation yet to come. The optimism overflows**

by the end of this B'RACHA, culminating in: Blessed are You, O Eternal, Who hears the sounding of the SHOFAR of His nation Yisrael in compassion.

This massive, magnificent Amida service is a rollercoaster ride of emotions and fervor. It brings us from the depths of despair over our guilt and shortcomings, to the heights of delight and elation in anticipation for the splendor yet to come. It's a long and intricate journey from our very beginnings to our Ultima Thule, but the sublime experience is definitely worth the price of admission, devoted davening. 