

Crowning the King of the World by Rabbi Reuven Mann

Rosh Hashanah, which commemorates the creation of the world, initiates the period known as the 10 days of Repentance that culminates on Yom Kippur. On this day, Hashem judges the world, which includes the various nations and states, as well as each individual. Nothing escapes His notice as He “reviews” the conduct and behavior of all that He has created.

There is, thus, a sense of awe and trembling as we consider the magnitude of the moment. We conduct our business throughout the year with the awareness that there is above us an “Eye that sees and an Ear that hears,” and that all our deeds are “inscribed in a Book.”

Now that Book is brought out to be scrutinized. Judaism teaches that there are consequences, both positive and negative, to our behavior. However, during the course of the year, especially when we are under the pressure of great needs or desires, we allow ourselves to become distracted from that reality. On Rosh Hashanah we are brought back to our senses by the realization that the time for judgment has arrived.

It is therefore appropriate that the major focus of the day is prayer. True, we are commanded to blow the shofar, but it is no accident that we do so at key places in the liturgy. The sounds of the shofar contain a profound meaning, and therefore complement the words we utter in the prayer service of Rosh Hashanah. On this day, we beseech the Creator with the precisely formulated words of the supplication, as well as the deeply meaningful blasts of the ram’s horn.

There is something unique and unanticipated about the Rosh Hashanah service. One might think that each person would be totally focused on his own specific needs at this time. We would imagine that Jews would pray for a favorable judgment and beyond that, for a goodly year of health, success, and happiness. However, that is not the case.

Instead of focusing on our individual fate, the prayers reflect a concern for the entire creation. An example of this is seen in the a special blessing known as “Holiness of the Name.” Ordinarily, this is a very short statement that asserts that “G-d and His name are holy and holy ones praise him every day.” The blessing is brief because there is not much we can say about Hashem’s holiness. No human mind can grasp the essence of the Creator, so that while we know that He is most awesome, we can’t give any further description. However, on Rosh Hashanah, this blessing is greatly expanded.

The extended version expresses the prayer that G-d, alone, will rule over His creation. In a sense, we are pleading that God should become the sole King recognized by all. At first glance, the idea of our praying for God’s kingship seems absurd. God *is* the King by virtue of His creation and absolute dominion over all that exists. The notion that He needs our prayers to realize any objective is nothing short of blasphemous.

Of course, we know that in truth, God is the King. However, the problem is that He is not acknowledged as such by His creatures. Man walks in blindness, as though he were a self-made being, and chooses to ignore his Creator. Hashem is therefore not yet King, for His rule has not been affirmed by man. The failure to recognize the truth of G-d, or to deny His exclusive dominion is the underlying cause of all the evil that exists.

On Rosh Hashanah we are praying for the survival of the world through the elimination of evil. This can only happen when Hashem's awesomeness is recognized and acknowledged, and when all mankind takes upon itself the "yoke of the Heavenly Kingship." So we plead with Hashem to manifest His awesome presence by placing the fear of Him on the entirety of His creation.

We request that He restore honor to His chosen nation, whose task it is to spread knowledge of the true G-d to mankind. Our fervent hope is that "G-d alone will reign over all His works," and this will come about because "wickedness will evaporate like smoke, and You will remove evil's domination from the earth."

Our Rosh Hashanah prayers have been characterized by even non-Jewish theologians as the most noble ever composed. Our focus is not on personal concerns, but on the perfection of the world. We firmly believe in the perfectibility of human nature. We beseech Hashem to assume His rightful role as King of the Universe. We ask that He allow His holiness, which is ordinarily hidden from view, to manifest itself in the human realm.

Left to his own devices, man is unwilling to recognize Hashem's glory. Our intense hope is that the Creator will initiate the process by which the fear and awe of Him will be felt by all, so that evil will dissipate and the latent goodness implanted in the creation will finally come to fruition. May we merit to achieve it, speedily and in our time.

May all of us be sealed in the Book of life for a good, sweet year.