



## Torah for Turbulent Times "Forgiveness"

Just one more week to go until Rosh Hashanah! Many of us are looking forward to our tried and true rituals of hearing the shofar, eating apples and honey, and focusing on the personal meaning of the holidays. While our services will feel different on Zoom this year, we will still sing "*Avinu Malkeinu*/Our Father, Our King" (at least some things don't change). We'll also sing it this Saturday night at 8:00 pm, along with hearing the shofar and preparing for the upcoming holidays. ([Join us](#) for Havdalah and Selichot.)

Jewish tradition is replete with images, songs, and stories about G-d as King. Just think of our basic blessing structure, "*Baruch atah...melech ha'olam*/Blessed are You...King of the world." For some, the image of G-d as King just doesn't work. It may only be a metaphor, as all images of G-d can only be, but for some it rings of irrelevance, patriarchy, power, etc. For others, it conveys respect, honor, awe, judgment, and maybe a little fear too. Being king was once upon a time seen as the most powerful human image on earth, and thus it was projected upwards to represent the Ultimate King. We also find the symbol for monarchy and majesty, the crown, adorning our Torah scrolls. Some say this is a stand in for G-d, and others say this puts a crown upon the ultimate Jewish achievements of learning and values!

Where do we first find the words, "*Avinu Malkeinu*?" They are used in the Talmud by Rabbi Akiva, as he prays for an end to the havoc caused by a drought in the land. Rabbi Akiva descended before the ark and prayed: *Our Father, our King*, we have no King other than You. *Our Father, our King*, for Your sake, have mercy on us. And rain immediately fell. The Sages were whispering among themselves that Rabbi Akiva was answered while his teacher, Rabbi Eliezer, was not. A Divine voice emerged and said: It

is not because this Sage, Rabbi Akiva, is greater than that one, Rabbi Eliezer, but that this one is forgiving, and that one is not forgiving. G-d responded to Akiva's forgiving nature in kind by sending rain. (Ta'anit 25b)

*Avinu Malkeinu* is a beautiful part of our liturgy. It compels us to seek forgiveness. May our prayers and aspirations for forgiveness and loving-kindness bring about a rainstorm of change, blessing, sustenance and hope to our world. As the saying goes, "To err is human; to forgive, divine."

-Rabbi Mark