

Bayom HaHu – On That Day...
RH Morning 2021/5782
By Rabbi Michele Brand Medwin, D.Min.

This morning, instead of focusing on the past. I want to focus on the future. Because Rosh Hashanah is all about the new year that is coming.

For the past year and a half as we held Shabbat services on Zoom, and even at Garlick's, there was one prayer I did not include in my slides.

The Aleynu.

I always feel a dramatic and spiritual connection to God as I stand before the ark, open the curtain, then bow low, saying, "*Aleynu l'shabeach*, It is up to us to praise You Adonai." Somehow reciting that prayer without an ark, didn't feel right to me.

The Aleynu was not always part of Shabbat services. It was composed as a piyyut, a liturgical poem, to be used on Rosh Hashanah. (by the Talmudic rabbi, Rav) It was written in the 3rd century. But in 1171, Jewish men and women were burned at the stake in France, for refusing to renounce Judaism. They recited the Aleynu as they died. "It is up to us to praise You Adonai." This act of martyrdom inspired the adoption of the Aleynu into our daily liturgy.

Let's take a look at the words in the Aleynu

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Ours is the duty to praise the All-Sovereign, to honor the Artist of Creation, who made us unique in the human family, with a destiny all our own. For this we bend our knees and bow with gratitude before the Sovereign Almighty, the wellspring of holiness and blessing, who spread out the sky and fashioned the earth. You are our God. There is none else.

Challenges of the Aleynu prayer –

1. Reflects on our unique identity as Jews, what is our destiny and how is it different from others.
2. Encourages us to meditate on what it means to praise God as the All-Sovereign

I'd like to take a moment to help you better connect to the words of the Aleynu

Rabbi Dov Peretz Elkins¹ has written a meditation using imagery to explore our relationship to God as the Sovereign of the Universe and the message that we, as Jews, are different from others, chosen by God. What does that even mean?

I encourage you to take a few deep breaths and close your eyes if you would like. Using your imagination, picture yourself in a you tube video as one tiny creature, part of one People which is only a fraction of one percent of the entire world. We are so small, and yet so important.
(Pause)

God chose us to fulfill an important mission. To teach the world how to be ethical and moral. We don't consider ourselves to be better than any other people or nations. We think of it as an obligation. We see it as an honor. God wants us to live according to the teachings of the Torah and Prophets. Now, imagine yourself, thousands of years ago, standing in a crowd, listening to one of the prophets try to teach the group the importance of the ethical laws God expects us to live by. Do you agree? Are you resistant? (Pause)

We have the responsibility to spread these high ethical principles. Aleynu tells us to praise God for choosing us and giving us this noble task.

Following the part of the Aleynu we are familiar with it there is an additional paragraph,

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And so, Adonai our God, we look to You,
hoping soon to behold the splendor of Your power revealed:
a world free of idolatry and false gods;
a world growing more perfect through divine governance;
a world in which all human beings make known Your name,
while those who do evil turn toward You instead.

We conclude by reciting Zechariah's words, "Bayom Hahu, ON THAT DAY..., God shall be One, and God's name shall be one. (14:9)

I chose to speak about the Aleynu today because it is a prayer of hope for the future.

Bayom Hahu - The Aleynu tells us that God wants us to recognize God as One. What does that mean? If God is One, then all God's creatures are One. One is the law of justice and equality by which all of us are judged. If all people could recognize this truth, there would be more unity in our world.

¹ Meditations for the Days of Awe, adapted by Rabbi Michele Medwin

Close your eyes again. Now imagine that this does come to be. See yourself united with all of the people on the planet. Feel a sense of Oneness with all creatures.

Bayom Hahu – try to imagine how the world will look when all people accept one law, one standard of truth and justice. Bayom Hahu - Feel the comfort, security, faith, and purity of God's total sovereignty, (Pause)

Let's thank the poet who wrote the Aleynu.

We as Jews dream of a world in which we all have the same ethics and values. Not that everyone needs to be Jewish, but that everyone respects each other, everyone is kind and caring, and values justice and righteousness. That may feel like an impossible dream, and sometimes we yearn to be woken up from the nightmare we have been living through during the past few years. How can we call God, One, if so many evils still exist? Perhaps, by reciting these words, it reminds us to keep going, to not give up hope, even when we are in despair.

The Jewish idea of redemption compels us to imagine a perfect world, a world that has reached full potential. The idea of redemption helps us to look beyond our lives as they are, to a world of possibility. Despite the horrors of the past few years, we cannot give up hope that the world can be better.

Let's now see how the Aleynu was originally used. In the context of the Shofar service on Rosh Hashanah.

We continue with the Shofar service. The first part of the shofar is Malchuyot. God as Sovereign.

When we get to the Aleynu, I invite you to reflect on your future hopes for yourself, for this country, and for the world. Let go of all the restraints that are currently holding you back, and let your imagination go wild. Imagine what a perfect world, would and could be like. And what your role could be, in helping to come nearer to the day when God WILL be one and God's name WILL be one.