

Likrat Rosh Hashana - 5767

We are so accustomed to saying "Aleinu" at the conclusion of "dovening" – that we are often caught by surprise on Rosh ha'Shana – when we find it in the middle of "shmone-esre"!

The truth is, our custom to say "Aleinu" every day only began about 600-700 years ago (approx. 14th century), while "Aleinu" as part of Musaf on Rosh ha'Shana has been our custom for almost two thousand years (since the time of the Amora 'Rav' / and some sources claim since the time of Yehosha bin Nun!).

In the following shiur, we explain its function as the opening "piyut" – introducing the "malchiot" section in Musaf; afterward we will suggest why it may have been added as a conclusion to our daily prayers.

INTRODUCTION

Three special blessings are added to Musaf on Rosh ha'shana – "malchiot", "zichronot", and "shofrot"; and after each of these blessings, we blow the shofar. Each section begins with an opening "piyut", introducing the topic - followed by the recitation of ten psukim from Torah, Neviim, and Ketuvim – and concludes with a short prayer that leads into the specific "bracha" [blessing].

As "Aleinu" serves as the opening piyut for "malchiot", our study of its theme will help us appreciate what "malchiot" is all about.

Let's begin by taking a careful look at its opening two lines:

עלינו לשבח לאדון הכול, לתת גדולה ליוצר בראשית:

**שלא עשנו כגויי הארצות, ולא שמנו ככל משפחות
האדמה,**

שלא שם חלקנו כהם, ולא גורלנו ככל המונם...

ואנחנו כורעים ומשתחווים ומודים לפני מלך מלכי המלכים...

As you read this opening section, pay attention how you translate the "shin" in "sh'lo asanu..." - In other words, did you understand this phrase as 'that' or as 'because'?

Let's explain the difference between these two possibilities:

The opening line of Aleinu states that it is our duty to praise [God] the master of everything... of all Creation. Then we continue by saying 'sheh' [translation unclear – for/that/because?] "He did not make us like the other nation, nor did He make our portion like theirs..." ; but it remains unclear if the second line is explaining

- how** we praise Him – [modifying "l'shabeyach"] or
- why** it is **our duty** to praise Him [modifying "aleinu"]

If it explains how we praise Him, then in essence we begin "malchiot" by praising God (and thanking Him) for not making us gentiles, and the "shin" of "sh'lo asanu" would be translated as 'that'.

If it explains why it is our duty to praise God, then we begin "malchiot" by explaining why it is OUR duty to sing God's praise 'because' that is why He didn't make us like the other nations, rather – He chose us and made us His special nation, in order that we praise His Name. [The praise itself, will come later.]

To help determine why the latter explanation makes more sense, we simply need to continue our study of this "piyut":

שהוא נוטה שמייס ויוסד ארץ;

ומושב יקרו בשמיים ממעל, ושכינת עוזו בגובהי מרומים.

This section clearly forms a 'praise of God' – which actually explains the opening statement. In other words, they explain how indeed God is "yotzer breishit" [for he formed the heavens and earth], and how He is "adon ha'kol" [for the throne of His Glory is high up in Heaven]. Thus, it would be logical to assume that the earlier phrase of "sh'lo asanu" explains why it is OUR DUTY to praise Him, while the "sh'hu noteh shamayim" explains how we praise Him.

[Furthermore, if the "sh'lo asanu" is the praise itself, it would make more sense to say 'aleinu l'hodot' – we should **thank him** for not making us gentiles, not "aleinu l'shabayach".]

If our understanding is correct, then the opening statement of Aleinu becomes quite significant – and helps us better understand what "malchiot" is all about. The accent is on the "**aleinu**" – it is OUR DUTY to praise God; as it was for this purpose that He chose us. Hence, "malchiot" is not simply our own recognition that God is King, but more so our realization that it is our duty and responsibility to bring the message of God's Kingdom to all mankind – by keeping His mitzvot.

However, the manner by which we bring that message is not through force or coercion. Rather, by setting an example, as God's model nation – following His laws, acting in a just and kind manner, and singing God's praises at every opportunity. By properly keeping God's mitzvot, the people of Israel can facilitate the recognition of God by all mankind.

V'AL KEIN N'KAVEH

To support this understanding of the first paragraph of "aleinu", we simply need to read the second paragraph:

על כן נקווה לך ה' אלוהינו, לראות מהרה בתפארת עוזך,

להעביר גילולים מן הארץ והאלילים כרות ייכרתון,

לתקן עולם במלכות שדיי.

וכל בני בשר יקראו בשמך, להפנות אליך כל רשעי ארץ;

יכירו ויידעו **כל יושבי תבל**, כי לך תכרע כל ברך תישבע כל לשון.

לפניך ה' אלוהינו יכרעו וייפולו, **ולכבוד שמך הגדול יקרי ייטנו,**

ויקבלו כולם עול מלכותך, ותמלוך עליהם לעולם ועד.

As you translate this paragraph, notice how we express our hope that God's plan will work, that we will 'fix the world – thru God's Kingdom' – that all mankind will come to recognize Hashem ["l'tikeyn olam b'malchut sha-dai"].

MLOCH AL KOL HA"OLAM KULO B"KVODECHA

The second paragraph leads right into the ten psukim that we quote for "malchiot". Then, before the "bracha" of "malchiot" we add one more prayer, which expresses once again this very same theme:

מלוך על כל העולם כולו בכבודך . . .

והופע בהדר גאון עזך – על כל יושבי תבל ארצך

וידע כל פעול כי אתה פעלתו – ויבין כל יצור כי אתה יצרתו

ואמר כל אשר נשמה באפו –

ה' אלוקי ישראל מלך - ומלכותו בכל משלה.

***** קדשנו במצוותיך ותן חלקנו בתורתך... ****

Note once again how we ask God that His plan for mankind be successful. Should we properly perform His mitzvot [note the continuation "kad'sheinu b'mitzvotecha v'ten chelkeinu b'torateicha"] – then all of God's creations will recognize that 'Hashem elokei Yisrael melech' – that the God who the people of Israel are constantly praising and following His laws – is indeed the only God.

FROM ROSH HA'SHANA to EVERY DAY

If our interpretation is correct, then the prayer of "Aleinu" is not simply a praise of God, rather it forms a beautiful explanation of what the nation of Israel is all about, and why we were chosen by God to sing His praise. In fact, it can serve as a statement of our "hashkafa".

As "Aleinu" expresses our goals and aspirations, it also forms a very meaningful prayer to recite every day upon the completion of our regular "tefila". In fact, before we leave the synagogue, it forms an excellent reminder and guideline for how we should act when we leave 'shul' and embark upon our daily endeavors.

May our prayers on this Rosh ha'Shana be answered, and may God's goal for His People be fulfilled –

Wishing everyone a shana tova &
ketiva v'chatima tova
menachem