ABINU MALKENU: You Are Our Father, You Are Our King

We are in a period of time called “The ten days of Teshuba,” the days between Rosh haShana and Yom Kippur, which includes Shabbat Shuba tonight and tomorrow. In preparation for Yom Kippur, in our prayers we ask HaShem again and again to inscribe us in the book of life.

These days we also make a radical change in the Amida text, the main prayer: instead of saying **HaE-l haQadosh**, “The Holy God” we say **HaMelekh haQadosh**, “The Holy King.”

These additions and changes help us achieve the right mental state for Yom Kippur.

What does HaMelekh Qadosh mean?

MELEKH: When we say “Melekh,” we shouldn’t be thinking of a king in a fairy tale. We have to think rather of a judge. In a monarchy, the King also acts as the Supreme Judge, the highest authority. The King issues the final verdict on the life or death of his subjects. These days we think of HaShem as the Supreme Judge, knowing that He determines whether or not we deserve to be sealed in the book of life. In Rosh haShana, the Celestial Court inscribes human beings in one of two books: life or death. But the final verdict is not sealed until the end of Yom Kippur. *And I have to seriously consider the possibility that I am appealing a verdict that so far is negative, and I must convince the Judge that if He did not inscribe me in the book of life, He should reconsider.* I have 10 days to appeal and invoke HaShem’s clemency, and show that I sincerely regret the wrong things I did. And during these ten days, including this Shabbat, I have to prove to the Supreme Judge that I am capable of being a very good person. Yom Kippur is the day of the final appeal: I will stand before

the Supreme Judge, acting as my own lawyer, imploring for my life.

QADOSH: "Qadosh," is usually translated as "holy." But in the context of this expression it means "unique," "different." In other words, we are saying that although HaShem is a judge, he is a very different judge. Why is HaShem as a judge different from a human judge? Because HaShem is an invisible judge, whom we do not see, but who sees and knows what a human judge does not know and does not see. Unlike a normal judge, HaShem knows what I do in private. HaShem is "unique" because he is a judge whom we cannot deceive with appearances or flattery … He is "unique" because nothing escapes His knowledge. Unlike a human judge, HaShem knows my thoughts, my intentions and my potential.

But if He knows everything, how will my repentance affect His final judgment and His verdict?

ABINU: HaShem as our judge is also "unique" because he is our Creator, our father. When one of my children makes a mistake, the most important thing for me is to make sure he or she has learned the lesson from his bad experience. And once my child has learned the lesson, he probably won't make the same mistake again. Therefore, when my child spontaneously approaches me, admits her mistake with sincerity and shows me that he understands that he made a mistake, why would I want to punish him? Quite the opposite! I will hug him, encourage him and show him that I trust him, and that I am very happy he has finally learned his lesson. Similarly, when we approach HaShem in Yom Kippur, He expects us to admit and confess our mistakes and transgressions, showing him that we have learned the lesson. If we do that, He will surely forgive us and spare us from the punishment we deserve. Because apart from being our King, He is our Father: we are his children.

This tremendously important concept is indicated in the beautiful prayer we say all these days: ABINU MALKENU (our

Father, Our King), which could be interpreted as: “You are our Father, [apart from being] our Judge.”