Good News: Your dad is the Judge!

This Shabbat is unique since it is at the center of “The Ten Days of Teshuba”, the days between Rosh haShana and Yom Kippur. During these ten days, we ask God repeatedly to inscribe us in the book of life.
And we also make a meaningful change in the text of the Amida, the central prayer: instead of saying HaE-l haQadosh, “Holy God” we say HaMelech haQadosh, “Holy King”.

These additions and changes help us get into the right mind for Yom Kippur.

What does HaMelekh Qadosh mean?

MELEKH: When we say “Melekh” we should not be thinking of a king from a fairy tale. We have to think instead of “Judge”. Why? In a monarchical state, the king acts as the Supreme Judge, the highest authority. The king also issues the final verdict in terms of the life and death of his subjects. He can sentence someone to die, and he can also spare the life of an individual sentenced to death. These days we think of HaShem as the Supreme Judge, knowing that it is in His hands whether or not we deserve the opportunity to live another year. On Rosh haShanah, the Heavenly Court inscribes human beings in one of two books: the book of life or the other book. But the final verdict is not sealed until the end of Yom Kippur, when the Judge signs the final sentence. During this time – after the ruling has been issued but before it’s signed – I have to appeal a possible “guilty” verdict. My mission is to convince the Judge that if He didn’t inscribe me yet in the Book of Life, He should reconsider. I have a few more days to prove that I sincerely regret what I did wrong. During these days, including this Shabbat, I have to prove to the Supreme Judge that I can be better. On Yom Kippur, I will stand before the

Supreme Judge, acting as my advocate and pleading for my life.

QADOSH: “Qadosh”, is usually translated as “holy”. But in the context of this expression, HaMelech haQadosh means “unique”, “different”. In other words, we are saying that HaShem is a very different judge from the other judges. First, God is an invisible judge, whom we do not see, but who sees us, knows us, and knows our secrets and private lives, which no human judge can know. HaShem is “unique” and “different” 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, intentions, and potential.

ABINU: But if He knows everything, how will my repentance affect His final judgment and His verdict? HaShem as Judge is “unique” because He is my Creator as well, that is, my Father. And I know what to be a parent means. When one of my children makes a mistake, I want to make sure that they recognize that they have made a mistake and learned a valuable lesson from their bad experience. And once I see that my child has learned his lesson, why would I want to punish him? Suppose my child comes to me spontaneously, admits his mistake honestly, and shows me that he will take the necessary steps to not make the same mistake in the future. In that case, I will hug him, encourage him, and show him that I trust him and am happy that he has finally learned his lesson. Similarly, when we approach HaShem on Yom Kippur and admit and confess our mistakes and transgressions, showing Him that we have learned our lesson, He will surely forgive us and suspend any potential negative sentence. Because apart from being our “Judge”, God is our Father: we are the Judge’s children!

This tremendously important concept is mentioned in the beautiful prayer we say every day now until Yom Kippur, including this coming Shabbat: ABINU MALKENU, declaring and reminding ourselves that apart from being our Judge, God is also our Father.