

# Avinu Malkeinu:

No prayer so thoroughly captures the Jewish people's dual relationship with G-d as *Avinu Malkeinu*, "Our Father, Our King."

The formula of the prayer, which has been expanded throughout the centuries to include a total of 44 verses, is based on the prayer that Rabbi Akiva, one of the greatest Talmudic sages, recited during a drought.

After the community's prayers had brought no relief, Rabbi Akiva went forward and called out to G-d, "Our Father, Our King, we have no king but You. Our Father, Our King, for Your sake have mercy on us!" Immediately, the rain began to fall.

אָבִינוּ מֶלְכֵנוּ הַחַזִירֵנוּ בְּתַשׁוּבָה שְׁלֵמָה לְפָנֶיךָ.

Our Father, Our King, return us to You in complete repentance.

אָבִינוּ מֶלְכֵנוּ שְׁלַח רְפוּאָה שְׁלֵמָה לְחֹלֵי עַמְּךָ.

Our Father, Our King, send a complete recovery to the sick of Your people.

אָבִינוּ מֶלְכֵנוּ קַרַע רוּעַ גְּזֵר דֵינֵנוּ.

Our Father, Our King, tear up the evil decree of our judgement.

אָבִינוּ מֶלְכֵנוּ זְכַרְנוּ בְּזִכְרוֹן טוֹב לְפָנֶיךָ.

Our Father, Our King, remember us in a positive memory before You.

אָבִינוּ מֶלְכֵנוּ כְּתִבְנוּ בְּסֵפֶר חַיִּים טוֹבִים.

Our Father, Our King, inscribe us in the book of good life.

אָבִינוּ מֶלְכֵנוּ כְּתִבְנוּ בְּסֵפֶר חַיִּים טוֹבִים.

Our Father, Our King, inscribe us in the book of sustenance and support.

אָבִינוּ מֶלְכֵנוּ כְּתִבְנוּ בְּסֵפֶר חַיִּים טוֹבִים.

Our Father, Our King, inscribe us in the book of sustenance and support.

אָבִינוּ מֶלְכֵנוּ כְּתִבְנוּ בְּסֵפֶר זְכוֹת.

Our Father, Our King, inscribe us in the book of merit.

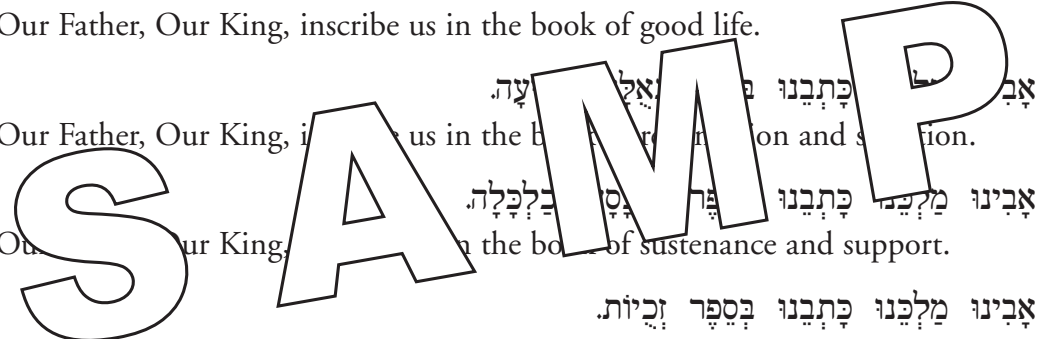
אָבִינוּ מֶלְכֵנוּ כְּתִבְנוּ בְּסֵפֶר סְלִיחָה וּמַחִילָה.

Our Father, Our King, inscribe us in the book of forgiveness and pardon.

אָבִינוּ מֶלְכֵנוּ חַנּוּן וְעֲנּוּן כִּי אֵין בָּנוּ מַעֲשִׂים

עֲשֵׂה עִמָּנוּ צְדָקָה וְחַסֵּד וְהוֹשִׁיעֵנוּ.

Our Father, Our King, be gracious with us and answer us, even though we have no worthy deeds, act with us in righteousness and goodness and save us.



**Question**--What are the implications of beseeching G-d using these very powerful, yet very different, metaphors: Father and King?

**Proposed Answer**--By addressing G-d as both our Father and our King, we are directing our prayers through two different avenues.

From a father, one expects mercy, love and forgiveness. A father looks at his child and sees only that child, that special individual, and instinctively feels mercy for the child, his own flesh and blood. Certainly we wish to address our petitions to G-d's fatherly aspect of His nature, the aspect of Judgment.

On the other hand, a King controls the fate of his subjects. He is the embodiment of judgment and justice, and we must also address our prayers to that aspect of G-d during Rosh Hashanah and the ten days that follow (through Yom Kippur). After all, this is the time that G-d sits with His books of judgment open before Him.

By referring to G-d as our King, we are reminding ourselves that while He loves us as a father, we must also be in awe of His greatness.

**Question**--How do the first nine statements of *Avinu Malkeinu* listed here lead to the concluding verse, and what does it mean that "we have no worthy deeds"?

**Proposed Answer**--Remember back to when you were a teenager and wanted to borrow the car. Before you approached your dad, you thought out your argument, the list of reasons you needed the car and deserved the car. But it wasn't your most stellar week. You didn't mow the lawn, you and your brother got in a fist fight, you broke the TiVo...Your best bet was honesty, "Dad, I know I don't really deserve the privilege, but could I borrow the car tonight?"

The nine public lines of *Avinu Malkeinu* make major requests of G-d, for health, for salvation, for sustenance...and what do we offer back? Nothing really. In presenting our requests for mercy from G-d, the final line reminds us of our lack of merit and of our need to strive harder in the year to come for that which we request this year.