

## Avinu Malkeinu – Allan Fox, September 2022

The Avinu Malkeinu, is a communal prayer,  
where together we state that we have committed wrongs,  
and we beg for God’s compassion, inspiration, and blessing.

*If* prayer is an opportunity, however, to go inward – to find meaning and  
connection, it’s the language of prayer  
– the first two words here in particular – that are problematic for me.  
Avinu – Our Father, and Malkeinu – Our King.

These words get in the way of my desire to turn inward –  
of me getting out of my head and into my heart.

I’m so much more comfortable with an untranslatable reference to God.

I hear Our Father, Our King and I’m anywhere but going inward.

I’m no longer present in prayer...I’m in the middle of a thinking exercise:

“So ...we’re asking Our Father, Our King for the same thing we’ve asked  
for, every high holiday season for more than 2000 years!?”

Are we just trying to wear God down?

Is this just a parental/child battle of wills?

Shouldn’t we expect at some point to get a response like, “If you ask me  
for that one more time, I’m gonna....”

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As an undergrad, on visits home to suburban Detroit,  
I'd occasionally spend some time with an elderly friend, Beverly.  
One time, as we chatted through lunch – at what must have been a High  
Holiday inspired restaurant called the Ram's Horn, Beverly asked:

“Do you believe in God?”

I shrugged. “I dunno, I guess.”

After lunch we went to her apartment because she had something for me.  
It didn't take long for her to find a yellowed and worn paperback book  
that she proceeded to inscribe,

“Dear Allan, From my heart to yours. Beverly.”

And as she handed me the book, “The Story of My Life By Helen Keller,”  
she said, “Believe in god.”

Helen Keller wrote of the moment when she made the connection,  
that everything had a name and how each name gave birth to a new thought.  
“That living word...” she wrote, “... awakened my soul, gave it light, hope, joy,  
set it free!”

If Beverly were here to ask me today, I'd say,

“No, I don't *believe* in God...”

What I *believe* is in the **power** of God, of prayer and of community.”

I *know* there is a God.

Just like I know there *is* Light.

Just like I know there *is* Love.

I know there *is* a God.

I just can't tell you what God is.

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So, with challenging prayers like Avinu Malkeinu,  
I find myself connecting to through the language of music.  
Depending upon the tune, you might find me nostalgically  
standing on the chair next to my dad who is singing the mournful communal  
plea from the economy seats at the back of our conservative shul.

Or maybe I'll be leaving the words behind altogether  
to soar with Shelly and our High Holiday musicians as they transport us to  
another place –  
higher, deeper or more inward together.

It's a communal prayer...so, maybe I'll see you there.