Today during Rosh Hashanah worship, we praise God as our “King” and “Sovereign Ruler.” And we will also offer many prayers for our own personal prosperity and needs. Some scholars have pointed out the paradox of praying for our own personal prosperity at the same time we affirm God’s Royal Sovereignty. Whom are our prayers serving?

One way I unravel life’s questions is through connecting to literature. One reason I think a former English teacher like me was so strongly attracted to choose Judaism is the way Jews constantly re-examine the stories in Torah to make meaning of their own lives. The themes in Genesis like those of Shakespeare’s plays resonate with us. But sometimes a powerful message can be found in a children’s story or a Facebook post.

Two stories which I stumbled upon this past month have helped me to make some sense of this seeming conflict in the Rosh Hashanah prayer intentions. One is from a picture book and another from a mother’s blog.

For many years, in a kindergarten classroom I worked in, we read, a picture book “I Love You the Purplest.” by Barbara Joosse. In it, two brothers ask their mother which one she loves the most. She explains she loves one of them the reddest and the other the bluest. Together, she loves them the purplest. I always loved this story because as the mother of twins, I have struggled with trying to be fair and even-handed with Marc and Isabel. At different times, one twin’s needs were greater than the other’s and I would hear, “You love Marc more than me!” or “You always get Izzy what she
wants!” I found this book again a few weeks ago, as we were setting up our kindergarten classroom and fondly reread it.

Then a few days later, a friend referred me to a blog called: “MOM - Not Otherwise Specified -- On Raising a Son on the Autism Spectrum, Progressive Politics, Pop Culture, and Coffee Addiction.” The blogger recalls how her autistic son’s birthday was celebrated in his inclusive regular ed. classroom. She begins with a reference to that same picture book I had just read, and its message of giving each child what they need. Her son had had a very difficult transition from a mostly separate special ed. class into a mainstream class. His birthday was approaching, and he was taken out of school the afternoon before it for an appointment. I’ll read you a shortened version of her story:

“And so, as Bud left school early on Thursday, his teacher Ms. Walker seized the opportunity, scrapped her plan for social studies, and pulled the class together for a little impromptu party planning session. She reminded them how hard it can be for Bud to manage things like birthday parties and she asked them how, as a group, they might help him celebrate in a way that would be comfortable for him. They spent the rest of the afternoon putting their plan together.

On Friday, Bud arrived at school to find that his classmates and all his teachers were wearing purple, Bud's favorite color, in his honor....A little later, Bud's friends presented him with a book they'd made. The book (purple, of course) features a page from each person in his class with the person's picture and name, to help Bud get to know those he doesn't know well. Each kid also wrote something they liked about Bud - some things
they had brainstormed as a class but some were unique like: “I think you're special because your jokes are hilarious.” "I like being your friend because you are funny and a good dancer;" “I think it’s cool how you remember all the words to whole TV shows!” Later that day, the class sang to him - but knowing that a cacophony of fourth grade voices might overwhelm him, their rendition of Happy Birthday was delivered in a loud whisper....The class commemorated the day with a group photo. It’s quite an image - a sea of purple, in shades from pale lavender to deep violet. All the beaming children have wide smiles - wide despite the fact that Ms. Walker had been frank with them: this was not to be the standard procedure for celebrating birthdays. This time was different - because in this class, ‘fairness’ does not equal ‘sameness.’ Fairness means making sure that every person gets what he or she needs to succeed. So, to be fair, sometimes we must have different rules for different people.

And the children, because they are a product of this unique classroom - they don't just get it - they celebrate it. They know that in a school in which helping a classmate get comfortable and feel included is just as important as social studies, they can be certain that every person matters. And if every person matters, then they matter.”

I ask you to consider our personal pleas this holiday for health, for life for prosperity in this light: Some of us want to be loved the reddest, some of us want to be loved the bluest. When we are taken care of by being given what we need, we can be part of creating a caring community - a microcosm of holy, purplest majesty - God's kingdom here on earth. This is
the will of God whose sovereignty we celebrate today. We use God’s gifts to bring more Godliness into the world.

And so I pray:
- O great and wondrous Sovereign God, grant me the ability to take the gift of life that You give me and "do the right thing" with it.
- Please, God, help me stay healthy so that I can be there for the people who need me.
- Please, God, make this a prosperous year for my family so that we can have more resources and more free time to study Torah and to grow spiritually and to contribute to the TBZ community - truly one of the purplest communities I know.