



The Collective Conversation

*Weekly Torah Essays from the
Young Israel of Scarsdale Community*



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The Favor of a Reply *

By Pierre Gentin

The invitations have been sent. The King is close by.

We live with a strong consciousness of God as a majestic, inscrutable and revered King. His is the abstract power that propels forward the natural order, "the force that through the green fuse drives the flower," in Dylan Thomas's words. The eternal Overseer of existence, God continuously creates and sustains, orchestrating the natural segues between seasons. He charges the world with birth and growth, then causes the inexorable degeneration and disappearance that befall everything time bound. We are in awe of omniscient God, the mystical source of beauty and wonderment, although He is definitionally concealed from us. And yet, given the divine spark within, we never quite accept His unknowability. We yearn to serve Him with unrestrained conviction even as our tradition counsels that we will never understand His ways. Like children letting go of precious balloons, we look heavenward as our prayers disappear into an infinity we cannot fathom.

But God is not solely our King. He is, first and foremost, our Father, our Parent. And we are His unique creations, members of His immediate family. When we say, during the month of Elul, that "the King is in the field," we mean that our beloved Father, who knows us completely and rejoices in us, is drawing closer to spend unmediated time with us. We are in awe of God as our King, but we love Him deeply as our Parent; "as the deer pants for streams of water, my soul longs for You," we say in *Tehillim*. There is euphoria in the awareness that we will soon spend intensive time with our God in a profoundly intimate dialogue of understanding, inspiration, and transformation.

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On Rosh Hashanah, we receive the most sought-after invitation that can ever be extended: the privilege of attending the Coronation of the Holy One, Blessed is He. We displace our frustrations, vanities, and sorrows to stand in our finery as the Sovereign arrives. The chazzan announces "The King," and each of us is given the priceless honor of placing the crown on God's head, as it were. A hundred shofar blasts thunder as we commemorate this unforgettable moment in our lives. We step back in awe as our King takes His seat on a shimmering sapphire throne and turns to us and all of creation in judgment.

After the Coronation, we're mindful that our Parent is nearby. It's confirmed that God has cleared a full day in His calendar; we're invited to spend 25 uninterrupted hours with Him. What a privilege to be alone with our God, to engage directly and without pretense, to put aside all physical distractions. A full day with our Father to offer pleas for health, prosperity, and fulfillment, for Him to focus attentively on us as we whisper about private worries, fears, and disappointments. A full day for God to watch us knowingly as we acknowledge with bitter regret the wasted time and ill-chosen priorities, the mistakes borne of our insecurity, weakness, and small-mindedness. A day of striving which culminates in God's great-hearted decree of forgiveness and hope. For our Parent reminds us once again that we are His cherished and unique children who exist only once in all His creation. Lightheaded, restored, reassured, we stand as our beloved Father leaves, our exalted King ascending through the seven heavens as His visit draws to a close.

And then, a remarkable final invite: a week-long celebration with the King in His palace. Outside, in creation, we gather in the *Sukkah* for that royal family reunion over fine food and drink, rejoicing in visitors who come and go, clasping symbols of the season in choreographed praise. It is not far off, that unforgettable, joyful week in the palace of our Father, the King. And where is He, the One who made us, who understands us, and whom we need so close at hand? He's there, hidden only by the thin bamboo that obscures what is infinite and timeless and true. If we can look up, look within, there will be time over these Days of Awe to count our blessings, bow before our King, embrace our beloved Parent, and experience gratitude and love that no words can contain.

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The invitations have been sent but the favor of a reply is not required. It turns out we need only bring ourselves.

** I gratefully acknowledge Rav Soloveitchik's inspirational essays in the collection, Before Hashem You Shall Be Purified: Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik on the Days of Awe (Arnold Lustiger, Ohr Publishing, 1998)*

*Want to write or dedicate a Parsha essay?
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