

Avinu/Malkenu - Our Parent, Our Ruler - We approach God, first and foremost, as a loving parent, hoping for indulgence, mercy, forgiveness. Parents offer us guidance, but the context of the relationship, ideally, is one of unconditional love. No wonder we open our plea to God through the channel of "Avinu."

However, the primary metaphor of the High Holiday season is "Malkenu" -- God in the aspect of power, of justice, of judgment. I think that it is harder for us to appreciate the positive benefits of a powerful God.

I reflected on this distinction as it relates to my work in the Army. Not to compare myself to God, l'havdil, but I carry two titles - Chaplain/Colonel, that each express some of these same qualities. Regardless of rank, Chaplains are always addressed as "Chaplain." From Second Lieutenant to Major General, you are and remain "Chaplain." The idea is to remove any barriers to connection, to create an environment where it is safe to open our hearts and to know that we will be heard in our

essential human-ness. The title "Chaplain", like that of Avinu, is meant to offer comfort. As a chaplain, I strive to be understanding of the personal needs of my Soldiers and respond with kindness to their personal struggles.

I know that they appreciate that pastoral touch. But that does not mean that there is no value to the aspect of being a Colonel! There are times when we need to fight for the resources we need or defend our position, and, at such times, my staff relies on the power that I wield as a Colonel to support their interests. This is the energy we long to tap into when we address God as "Malkenu," - the God who has the power to influence change. A God who was all Avinu and no Malkenu, who operated only on the principle of mercy with no focus on justice, would be uninspiring. We pray, "v'yakhed l'avenu l'ahava u'l'yirah-unite our hearts to love and to be in awe." We need this sense of balance, we need the Avinu and we need the Malkenu, in our relationship to God.

That said, we hope that our prayers on Yom Kippur will move the Holy One from the throne of judgment to the throne of compassion. We need a God who is powerful; we long for a God whose love overcomes that sense of power. The Rabbis depict God as praying, "May it be My will that My mercy will suppress My anger." On this day, we pray that God's prayer will be answered! The ancient philosopher Thucydides wrote that, "Of all manifestations of power, restraint impresses. . .most."

We pray for the ability to restrain ourselves from doing wrong, and we pray this day that God's power will be exercised through restraint from punishment.