

I Spread Out God's Names in Front of Me

I spread out God's names in front of me on the floor of my chilly room.

The name by which I called him when his spirit breathed in me. And the name by which I called him when I was a young girl.

The name by which I called him when I was given to a man.

And the name when I was again permitted to all.

The name by which I called him when my parents were a roof over me. And the name when I had no ceiling.

The name by which I called him so that I would not be afraid.

The name by which I called him so that he would remember me. And the name so that he would refrain from remembering.

In the heat of day I will prostate myself on the floor of my chilly room.

—RIVKA MIRIAM
(translated by
Linda Stern Zisquit)

Aleinu

We rise:

It is for us to praise the ruler of all, to acclaim the Creator, who has not made us merely a nation, nor formed us as all earthly families, nor given us an ordinary destiny.

¶ And so we bow, acknowledging the supreme sovereign, the Holy One, who is praised— who spreads out the heavens and establishes the earth, whose glory abides in the highest heavens, and whose powerful presence resides in the highest heights. This is our God, none else; ours is the true sovereign, there is no other.

As it is written in the Torah:

“Know this day and take it to heart, that ADONAI is God in heaven above and on earth below; there is no other.”

Aleinu l'shabei'ah la-adon hakol,

lateit g'dulah l'yotzer b'reishit,

shelo asanu k'goyei ha-aratzot,

v'lo samanu k'mishp'hot ha-adamah,

shelo sam helkeinu kahem,

v'goraleinu k'kol hamonam.

¶ Va-anahnu korim u-mishtahavim u-modim,

lifnei melekh malkhei ha-m'lakhim, ha-kadosh barukh hu.

Shehu noteh shamayim v'yosed aretz,

u-moshav y'karo ba-shamayim mima-al,

u-sh'khiyat uzo b'govhei m'romim,

hu eloheinu ein od.

Emet malkeinu efes zulato,

ka-katuv b'torato:

v'yadata ha-yom vahashivota el l'vavekha, ki Adonai hu ha-elohim

bashamayim mima-al, v'al ha-aretz mitahat, ein od.

We rise:

עָלֵינוּ לְשׁוֹבַח לְאֲדוֹן הַכֹּל,
לְתַת נִדְלָה לְיוֹצֵר בְּרֵאשִׁית,
שְׁלֹא עָשׂוּנוּ בְּגוֹי הָאֲרָצוֹת,
וְלֹא שָׂמְנוּ בְּמִשְׁפָּחוֹת הָאֲדָמָה,
שְׁלֹא שָׂם ה' לָנוּ בְּהֵם,
וְגִרְלָנוּ בְּכָל־הַמּוֹנָם.

¶ וְאִנְהֵנוּ בּוֹרְעִים וּמִשְׁתַּחֲוִים וּמוֹדִים,
לְפָנֵי מֶלֶךְ מַלְכֵי הַמַּלְכִּים, הַקָּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא.

שְׁהוּא נוֹטֵה שָׁמַיִם וְיִסַּד אֶרֶץ,

וּמוֹשֵׁב יְקָרוֹ בַּשָּׁמַיִם מִפְעֵל,

וְשׁוֹכֵנֵת עֵזוֹ בְּבִקְהֵי מְרוֹמִים,

הוּא אֱלֹהֵינוּ אִין עוֹד.

אִמַּת מַלְכָּנוּ אִפְסֵ זוּלָּתוֹ,

בְּפִתּוּב בְּחוּרָתוֹ:

וְיִדְעַת הַיּוֹם וְהִשְׁבַּתְתְּ אֶל לְבָבְךָ,

כִּי יְהוָה הוּא הָאֱלֹהִים בַּשָּׁמַיִם מִפְעֵל,

וְעַל הָאֶרֶץ מִתַּחַת, אִין עוֹד.

ALEINU עלינו. Since the 12th or 13th century, the Aleinu prayer has acquired a special pride of place in Ashkenazic liturgy and is recited at the conclusion of every service; it does not play the same role in the Sephardic liturgy.

The origin of this popular prayer is a matter of debate. Some medieval sources (e.g. Rokeah, early 13th century, Germany) ascribed it to Joshua. The liturgical scholar Joseph Heinemann thought that it dates back to the time of the Temple service. Other scholars have argued that it originated in 2nd- or 3rd-century mystical circles. Its first known use in the formal liturgy is as an introduction to the Malkhuyot (“Sovereignty”) section of the Rosh Hashanah Musaf service.

Aleinu articulates a progression of ideas. In the first paragraph, we are asked to express our gratitude for the special fate and role of the Jewish people in history. In the second, we look forward to the day when differences among peoples will be harmonized and there will be a common recognition that all of humanity is embraced by God. This vision recognizes that God is not exclusively the God of Israel, but that God rules over all of us. On that day, when justice, morality, and common spiritual affinity will reign on earth, God's name will truly be one.

Some have objected to what may sound like exclusivist language in this prayer, in particular the phrases describing the uniqueness of the people Israel: “who has not made us merely a nation, nor formed us as all earthly families, nor given us an ordinary destiny.” The Israeli Masorti Movement offers an alternative formulation quoting Micah 4:5: “For the people of every nation shall walk in the name of their god, but we shall walk in the name of Adonai, our God, forever.” Whether articulated with this wording or the standard text, Aleinu both asserts a pride in Jewish destiny and challenges us to go out to the world committed to Jewish spiritual values.

AND SO WE BOW בּוֹרְעִים בּוֹרְעִים. The prayer mentions a variety of forms of bowing. In ancient times, *korim* meant touching the floor with one's knees, and *mishtahavim* meant bending at the waist. However, the ancient rabbis minimized the bowing that takes place in the service, and so today it is customary to simply bow one's head or slightly bend one's body at this point in the prayer.

KNOW THIS DAY הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה הוּא הָאֱלֹהִים בַּשָּׁמַיִם מִפְעֵל. Deuteronomy 4:39.