

Rosh Hashana, Avenu, Prayer Comment

- Nisson Shulman.

Avenu as a prayer comment, see the universality of the second paragraph and compare with particularism of the first paragraph. Can be used as prayer comment or sermon idea.

ALENU-COMMENT OR SERMON IDEA

The second paragraph of ALENU is surely the most universal prayer in the liturgy. Jews aren't even mentioned! The day will come when all mankind, regardless of race, color, or any other difference, will together acknowledge the Sovereignty of God, King of the Universe. False gods will be abolished. All mankind will accept God's Kingdom. It concludes, "On that day God will be King over all the earth. On that day the Lord shall be One, and His Name One."

The first paragraph, on the other hand, is very particular. It turns its back on the world. It deals only with our people. We thank God for making us unique; for choosing us; for giving us a special role and destiny.

Yet these two paragraphs are put together as if they are one prayer! The one wholly particular, the other wholly universal, yet they are one! And the link is provided by the opening words of the second paragraph. Two simple Hebrew words: AL KEN. THEREFORE. "For this reason!"

In these two words lies the message of these days and the call to our people!

We weren't called to be the standard bearers of the word of God for the sake of any special privilege or consideration. If anything, it was for untold suffering. But as a result of that choice and those hardships, one day the knowledge of God and obedience to His law will permeate the world.

We are far from having accomplished this. If anything, in recent years the world had slid back from truth, justice, ethics, morality. On the other hand, wherever there is knowledge of God and whatever knowledge there is has been due to the Jewish people. And it has all been achieved without preaching or missionizing, but by living as an example.

So the two paragraphs of ALENU constitute a sober statement of fact. Choosing the Jews as the Torah's teachers has brought the acknowledgment of God nearer.

We still have a long way to go before the second paragraph will be fulfilled. But if we are true to the first, we will hasten the day. The Shofar calls out to us to renew the covenant stated in the first paragraph. May we answer its call.