

Hin'ni: For Myself and My Community

Rabbi Leon A. Morris

It will be helpful at the beginning to just look at the two texts of *Hin'ni* (see pages 226–227). These two versions of *Hin'ni* were provided in the *Mishkan HaNefesh* pilot for Rosh HaShanah evening. The first, which would go on the right side, is essentially just a new translation of the mostly traditional text, with some of the references that Dr. Sarason just pointed out as being absent in *Gates of Repentance* also absent here: including *satan* and the gendered language of what the prayer leader should look like. But it's a fresh, beautiful translation rendered by Rabbis Shelly and Janet Marder. The second piece, which would go on the left, allows each person, and not just the prayer leader, the opportunity to recite the *Hin'ni*. And there's a number of ways congregations could use this. It could be that the leader's reciting the right side and that the individual congregant is simultaneously reading the left side, or just providing a space for individuals to read the left side for individual reflection.

It's an interesting move to create a *Hin'ni* in which we really shift the role of leadership to each and every person, and we sort of play down the role of the rabbi, or the cantor, or the *sh'liach tzibur*. And I wanted to connect that move with a story. Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Rimanov turned to the congregation who had come to pray with him and he said, "You're a beautiful congregation but I cannot carry you on my shoulders. Each of you must exercise your own *t'shuvah*, your own *t'filah*, and your own *tzedakah*." So that's part of the kind

of spirit or impetus that led to the creation of an individual reflective *Hin'ni* for the left side.

I want to just share a few thoughts about a few key lines that appear in the right-hand side version, and then I just wanted in the remaining time to point out a few other interesting links. The opening line, which we have here in English and in Hebrew is, "*bati laamod u'lchanein l'fanecha al amcha Yisrael asher sh'lachuni af al pi she-eini ch'dai v'hagun l'chach.*" In some ways, this line really expresses the guiding spirit of the whole poem. This is a line, as Rick alluded to, that particularly at this time of year, we rabbis really feel. There's so much about the High Holy Days which is carefully scripted and choreographed, and yet this is a line that reminds us we have to cultivate in ourselves an awareness of what we're trying to do on the High Holy Days. What does it mean to facilitate *t'shuvah* and true *t'filah* for our communities when we may feel that we ourselves have not completed our personal work of *t'shuvah*? And on the one hand, it speaks of a need for modesty as a rabbi or cantor in stepping forward at all. But then at the end, we're drafted into service. It says, "I rise to pray and seek favor for Your people Israel because they have entrusted me with this task." And that balance is particularly striking and beautiful. It's the balance between the modesty and strength that's required of religious leadership.

There's a beautiful quote by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, I think it is from his *machzor*, in which he says, "The paradox of spiritual leadership is that those who think they are great are small, those who think themselves small are great. In Judaism, all leadership, including leadership in prayer, is a form of service, not superiority or dominance, and cannot exist without humility." So that's one line I

just wanted to offer reflection on. Another is just a little bit further down. We translated it here as, “I pray to you for success on my path. I pray for myself and my community.” And I think it triggers us as *sh’lichei tzibur* to think about what really is a successful High Holy Days. There are so many other ideas about what a “successful” High Holy Days could be. “Everyone loved my sermon.” “The new system of entrance cards worked really well.” “The ushers did a great job.” *Hin’ni* reminds us that the goal here is success on a path that has something to do with transformation, and change, and hope, and courage, something of alternate meaning.

I wanted to pick up, finally, just with this section that Rick mentioned, where the traditional text is not only as we have here that the leader be proficient in prayer, and unblemished in character, and pleasing in voice, but traditional text as, “*ka-beil t’filati b’tifilat zakein v’ragil uz’kano m’gudal.*” So, putting aside the obvious problems that we would have with this and why we couldn’t include this in *Mishkan HaNefesh*, the original context of this is from *Mishnah Taanit 2:2* and it has to do with who is a fitting prayer leader for a time of drought, for a fast that has been established because of a drought. And that’s a beautiful idea here. We aspire to be, in some sense, prayer leaders whose description fits the prayer leader in a time of drought. And I think it leads us to think about, well, what’s the drought that we have? What’s the spiritual drought in American Jewish life that we’re trying to address? What do we ultimately want to do to bring rain to our community?

I wanted to highlight two links that are really worth checking out that are on the same homepage for this conversation. One is entitled ‘Singing Leonard Cohen on Yom Kippur: Being an Angel or

See Rabbi Mishael Zion, “Singing Leonard Cohen on Yom Kippur: Being an Angel or a Broken Hill?”. Huffington Post, 09/24/2012 (HuffPost Religion live-blog) http://www.huffingtonpost.com/rabbi-mishael-zion/leonard-cohen-on-yom-kippur-being-an-angel-or-a-broken-hill_b_1907516.html.

a Broken Hill?' This is an article for the Huffington Post that my friend and our colleague, Rabbi Mishael Zion, wrote about based on his experience growing up in Jerusalem in a particularly innovative minyan where, along with *Hin'ni*, Leonard Cohen's 'If It Be Your Will' would be sung. And this is his beautiful *d'rash* on the lines of Cohen's poem 'If It Be Your Will.' And there's also a link to the Webb Sisters and Leonard Cohen singing it in concert. My congregation actually used this on *Kol Nidrei*, at the very beginning of *Kol Nidrei* last year. Very, very powerful. There's also a link here from the great website, piyut.org.il, of Yossele Rosenblatt singing *Hin'ni* in all of its drama from the—as immodest as it may be, probably from the back of a sanctuary as Rick had mentioned. I hope all of these links are helpful.

Leonard Cohen—
The Webb
Sisters—If It Be
Your Will—The
Louisville Palace—
30-03-2013”
[http://www
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xRhgaH-i-kOe4.](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xRhgaH-i-kOe4)