

Avinu Malkeinu  
Yom Kippur Comps Iyyun  
Spring 2020

Avinu Malkeinu is a particularly interesting in that it essentially encapsulates all supplicatory prayers into one. It is an all-encompassing ask for G-d to do everything we need him to do on our behalf. With respect to that, it makes sense that the prayer is so long—44 verses in the Birnbaum Machzor, which follows the Polish tradition. In terms of structure, the opening two verses stand out as being different from the rest. They are, if you will, our opening statements before asking for what we want. In the first verse we accept responsibility for our actions by acknowledging that “we have sinned”. This admittance of wrongdoing is brief—the shortest of the 44 verses, in fact.

Next, we make a statement of devotion to G-d, swearing that “we have no king except thee”. The rest of the verses can be divided into 3 sections. Section 1 focuses on eliminating our evil from our midst. Specifically, we ask G-d to abolish: “evil, enemies, foes, oppressor, adversary, pestilence, sword, famine, captivity, destruction, iniquity, persecution, and plague”. The 2<sup>nd</sup> section has a noticeable change in tone, switching from a focus on destroying the negative to instead redeeming the positive. “perfect, repentance, favorably, mercy, healing happy, sustenance, merit, pardon, salvation, and forgiveness.

The final section of this prayer again refocuses. While initially we asked G-d to do things on our behalf, now we ask G-d to do things for his own sake. We try desperately to bring awareness to the unbreakable connection we have to G-d by stating that our fates are intertwined. Our final plea in this prayer is that by saving us, G-d will demonstrate his great might and mercy. We beg G-d “do it for thy sake, if not for ours.”