

ZOKHREINU LE-HAYYIM Singing our Pleas and Uncertainties

Rabbi Deborah Sacks Mintz
with a new song from the Rising Song Institute

We all yearn to be remembered. We yearn to be remembered by our loved ones and our communities. We yearn to be remembered for the good we have done, rather than the ways we have fallen short.

This natural human inclination manifests repeatedly in our High Holiday liturgy; Rosh Hashanah is, after all, also termed Yom HaZikaron ("the Day of Remembrance"). Embedded in the texts of our prayers is not only a yearning to be remembered for good by those around us, but a plea to be remembered *le-hayyim*, for life, by God.

Recited in each and every Amidah during the Aseret Yemei Teshuvah (the ten days of repentance between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur), this line, originating in the time of the Geonim, reads as an impassioned, desperate plea:

זְכֹרְנוּ לַחַיִּים מִלֵּךְ חַפֵּץ בַּחַיִּים
וְכַתְּבוּנוּ בְּסֵפֶר הַחַיִּים לְמַעַן
אֱלֹהִים חַיִּים

*Remember us for life,
Sovereign, Who desires life, and
inscribe us in the Book of Life,
for Your sake, Living God.*

Appealing to the hope that God deeply wants life for each and every one of us, as seen in Ezekiel (18:32), this passage invokes this desire on both the communal and individual level. By situating this line in the

Amidah, we root our own individual, personal stories of both strength and fallibility to that of our ancestors; God remembered the divine promise to Abraham,¹ and we invoke this deeply personal Divine-human relationship as we utter this powerful line. However, we sing this line in the plural, noting that our anguish over the ways we have fallen short are not only on a personal level, but on a communal level as well. The yearning to be remembered *le-hayyim*, for life, extends beyond the self, encompassing those with whom we live our lives.

I offer here a new melody for this plea, seeking to explore the pleading tone of this text more deeply through musical composition. The melody reaches its climax on the word "*le-ma'ankha* - for Your sake," placing the singer's emphasis on the aforementioned belief that God does in fact desire for us to be remembered, forgiven, and allowed to live another year. However, a question is embedded in this very plea: for we know that to be remembered, written, and sealed in the Book of Life is never a guarantee. Repeated twice, with the first time remaining musically unresolved, this melody seeks to capture that state of uncertainty.

This is the nature of prayer; for our most heartfelt pleas contain our deepest questions. ♦



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¹ See Psalm 105:42.

Zokhreinu

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Am G C C G Em Am

Zokh - rei-nu le - ha - yyim me - lekh ha-feitz ba - ha - yyim ve -

5 Am Dm G C Dm F G Em Am

khot - vei-nu be - se-fer ha-ha-yyim le - ma'an-kha E - lo - him ha - yyim ve -

9 Am Dm G C Dm F G Em Am

khot - vei-nu be - se-fer ha-ha-yyim le - ma'an-kha E - lo - him ha - yyim le -

13 Am C Dm E E7 Am

ma'an - kha le - ma'an - kha E - lo-him ha - yyim le - ma'an - kha le -

18 C Dm F G Em Am

ma'an kha, o le - man - kha E - lo - him ha - yyim.