

Days of Awe**By: Yanki Tauber**

Kings have been in rather short supply in recent generations.

Of course, there's still the Queen of England. She has a crown, a throne, a palace, guards, ladies-in-waiting--the works. Theoretically, she can even dismiss her parliament and start issuing decrees. But we all know that she'll never do that. So all the pomp and ceremony has a false ring to it. The crown on her head looks like a Purim costume.

So we're looking for a real despot? There are still some of those around. Saddam Hussein--now there's someone who can bark "Off with his head!" just like in the old days. Still, one would hardly call those fellows "kings". They instill dread, not awe; they possess power, not majesty. A crown on their head would look ludicrous (Saddam knows that--that's why he doesn't wear one).

The kings we remember from our childhood story books had majesty. They evoked fear, but also love. Their subjects trembled before them, but they *wanted* to tremble before them. There was lots of pomp and ceremony, but the pomp and ceremony meant something, represented something real. The crown on their head looked like it belonged there.

The essence of Rosh Hashanah, our sages tell us, is that it is the day on which we crown G-d king of the universe.

Unless you're particularly religious, "G-d" is probably not a word that you use comfortably. Add to that "king of the universe," and that's enough to make a modern person squirm. When we go to the synagogue on Rosh Hashanah, most of us would not think of it as attending G-d's coronation.

But let us contemplate for a moment what is it that we are missing in our lives. Why it is that we still yearn for those kings of our childhood world.

What we lack in our lives is awe. With a click of the mouse, we can purchase a meal or a house, find a job or a marriage partner. What is much more difficult to find is a source of authority in our lives.

There are, of course, plenty of people out there who are prepared to tell us what to do, including many who, given the opportunity, would force us to do what they are telling us to do. But that's not authority, any more than Saddam Hussein is a king.

And we can, of course, appoint our favorite psychologist, pundit or fashion guru as the authority in our lives. But in the final analysis, that's just another form of take-or-leave-it advice. It's not the authority we need and crave, any more than the Queen of England is a king. It's nice and beautiful and impressive, but at the end of the day, we're left with the same hollowness inside.

30 September

Ha'Azinu and Shuvo

Shabbat Begins: 6:26 pm

Shabbat Ends: 7:25 pm

True authority is absolute. It commands, not advises. At the same time, it is not something imposed upon us, for it is fully in harmony with our quintessential will. It is something to which we submit wholly and unequivocally, but to which we want to submit wholly and unequivocally because we recognize it as the voice of our deepest self.

On Rosh Hashanah, we devote two days to the search for the voice of authority we so deeply crave, for the king of the universe we have been seeking since our childhood. But don't look for Him in the synagogue, in your prayerbook or in the rabbi's speech. Look for Him in your deepest self: in the things that no one has to tell you, because you already know them absolutely; in the commitments to which you willingly submit, because you recognize them to be expressions of, rather than impositions upon, your true will.

On second thought, do go to the synagogue, where you will be in the company of many others conducting the same search, seeking that same core of truth and source of awe. Do read the verses printed in the prayerbook, which capture humanity's six-thousand-year quest for a king.

When the *shofar* sounds, close your eyes. Imagine yourself in the midst of a jubilant crowd who has gathered to celebrate the coronation of their king. Hear the trumpet blasts that express the terror and joy of a people submitting to an authority that embodies their own deepest strivings and aspirations.

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