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שמע קולינו

Tamuz
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Sh'ma Kolaynu

Hear Our Voices

שמע קולינו, *Sh'ma Kolaynu* – "Hear our Voices," is considered the essence of prayer in the Talmud (Megilla 18a). These words begin the only blessing of the daily *Amida* in which insertions of one's own prayers, in one's own language, may be added, according to the tradition. *Sh'ma Kolaynu* is also the dramatic call to God sung before the opened ark during *selichot* – the penitential prayers said on fast days; when preparing for the High Holydays; and, especially, at the beginning and end of *Yom Kippur*. This prayer seeks to establish for us that our need to connect is realizable, that we can be

“Hear our Voice”

heard, that our prayers are valid. We need to know that the seeking

of our longing hearts is not just a whining voice in the wind, a tin can of no substance knocking about in a storm. To know that we are NOT invisible, of no account, or unworthy is the beginning of self-esteem, and the basic ground from which any relationship can flow. We ask this of God, to hear our voices, as God heard Abraham, Moses, and all our parents, flawed human beings all, in every generation.

Our God is also asking, making the same prayer to us – “*Sh'ma Koli!*– Hear my voice! *Sh'ma Yisrael!*– Hear O Yisrael! – Listen to me! Don't just be constantly sending your prayers towards me and then go on with your lives without listening for my responses!

Listen for my reaction, my advice on your requests, listen to all the messages, comfort, encouragement, certitude, and healing that I am sending to you. Daily my voice goes out to you and so often returns unheard. *Sh'ma Koli!*”

Sh'ma Kolaynu is also a prayer that we say to each other. We ask each other to allow each voice to be heard. Let us listen to everyone, validate each other's predicaments, each other's feelings. Each of us has our defects, our sense of marginality. We need to ensure that each person knows that she or he has a precious place in the community, neither more nor less valid than anyone else's place. Only by validating ALL of our voices, by making sure that everyone has a voice and may be heard, can we all feel that this is an inclusive, just community in which everyone can grow in an egalitarian atmosphere where each person is honored for being human.

Sh'ma Kolaynu, hear our voice, is our *kavvana* as we begin preparation for the High Holydays by hearing each others' voices – all of our voices – in study, in debate, in prayer, in stories and song. May our voices be heard as one.

שמע קולינו
Shema Koleynu

