

## Ovinu Shebashomayim

### A Story For Neilah <sup>1</sup>



A small boy was standing by the seashore looking far out to sea and waving a white flag. Three men came along and they said to him:

“Little boy: what are you doing?”

The little boy said to them:

“Do you see that big ship far out in the sea? Well, I’m waving to the captain of the ship so that he can see me and wave back.”

The men laughed at the little boy and they said:

“Little boy! What makes you think that the captain of the ship will be looking this way? And even if he is looking this way what makes you think that he’ll see you? And even if he does see you what makes you think that he’ll care enough to wave back?”

The little boy gave them no answer but just carried on waving his flag towards the sea. The men stood laughing at him for a few minutes and then turned away to go. But just as they began to move the little boy started jumping up and down excitedly and waving his flag harder and harder than ever; and as the men followed the direction of his frantic waving, to their amazement they saw a little white speck come out of a porthole on the side of the ship and start fluttering in the breeze as if waving back. And the little boy waved his flag harder and harder and faster and faster, and the little white speck on the horizon also waved faster and faster and harder and harder.

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<sup>1</sup> As told by Daniel Greenberg CB each year for several years before the Neilah Service in the Alternative Minyan at Golders Green Synagogue, written down now at the request of former congregants to share with their children. This is a traditional story told in many forms, and I do not know who first told it in anything like this form; if anyone is able to let me know I would like to credit the original storyteller.

This went on for a few minutes as the men stood there amazed and then finally the little white speck was withdrawn into the side of the ship, and the boy, with a happy smile, lowered his flag and made to leave.

But the men stopped him and said:

“Little boy: we’re sorry we laughed at you. But tell us, how could you possibly know what was going to happen?!”

And the little boy looked at them with his happy smile and he said:

“Well, there’s one thing that perhaps I didn’t tell you. You see, the captain of that ship is my daddy! And he always looks out for me whenever he comes this way: and I wave to him so he knows that I love him, and he waves to me so that I know he loves me.”

The nations of the world watch the Jewish people as we go through our strange rituals. And so many of them seem to make so little sense. So much of what we do in our ritual lives has the appearance of meaningless gestures in the air. And sometimes perhaps we even doubt to ourselves how much they achieve.

But on *Yom Kippur* we remind ourselves when we say *Ovinu Malkeinu* that at the end of the day, when all is said and done, the relationship between *Klal Yisroel* and our God can best be summed up in the words of the little boy: “the captain of the ship is our daddy”. We are not subjects of the King; we are not worshippers of the King; “*bonim atem laHashem Eloikeichem*”: we are God’s children and God is our parent. We slip our hand into God’s at the final moments of *Yom Kippur* with all the confidence of a child slipping their hand into the hand of their mother or father, knowing that it will always receive a loving embrace and a tight hold. And when we move to *Sukkot* and we go through one of our strangest rituals of waving the *arba minim*, there is no doubt in our minds to whom we are waving to show our love, or that it is reciprocated.

*Yehi ratzon* that we, the whole Jewish people, and the whole world, will be granted a year of peace and positivity, in which we all unite together, all humanity as one, as siblings sharing love for and from our one Parent – *Ovinu Shebashomyim*.

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