

~ זכרנו לחיים ~

Zochreinu Lechaim

An in-depth study on the Nusach of the Yomim Noraim Tefillos

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Introduction

“The Tefillos of Rosh Hashona are set forth in their order. One should not add or detract even one word from the handwritten manuscript of Rabbi Yehuda Hachassid, son of Rabbi Shmuel the Chassid, a holy man and prophet, son of Rabbi Kolonimus the elder, son of Rabbi Yitzchok, the son of the great Rabbi Elazar. Anyone who adds or detracts even one letter, his Tefillos will not be heard, because they are all carefully measured and weighed in their letters and words and many secrets are contained within them¹.”

In the Rosh Hashona and Yom Kippur Amidah we add a number of extra passages. One of the additions is *Zochreinu Lechaim* which is added into the first Brocha of the Amidah. The standard Nusach² of this addition is;

זכרנו לחיים מלך חפץ בחיים וכתבנו בספר החיים למענך אלוקים חיים

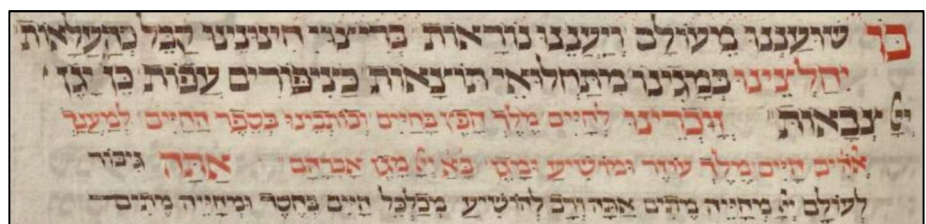
Remember us for life, O King Who desires life, and inscribe us in the Book of Life for Your sake, O Living G-d.

Origin

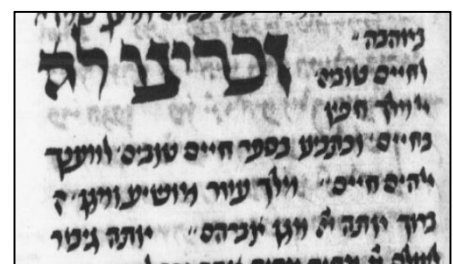
Zochreinu Lechaim is not mentioned anywhere in the Talmud. The earliest reference to *Zochreinu Lechaim* is quoted in the names of the Geonim, including Rav Hai Gaon and Baal Halachos Gedolos³ (who writes that it should not be said).

It is also mentioned and discussed in the works of the Rishonim, including; Avudraham, Yehuda ben Yakar⁴ (teacher of the Ramban), Tosfos⁵, Rambam⁶, Rosh, Ra'n⁷ and Rashba⁸. It is also found in the text of the earliest Siddurim including Machzor Vitri and the Seder Hatefillos of the Rambam.

There are differing views in the Poskim as to when *Zochreinu Lechaim* was composed and added to the Tefillos. When and by whom these additions were composed has Halachic implications which will be discussed later in this article.



Machzor Nuremberg 1331 (5091)



Machzor Vitri 1204 (4964)

¹ Siddur Chassidei Ashkenaz - Pirush on the Tefillos of Rabbi Yehuda Hachassid for Rosh Hashona;

² See below for alternate Nuschaos

³ See Tur OC 582

⁴ Pirush Tefillos and Brachos

⁵ Brachos 12b ד"ה והלכתא ב

⁶ Hilchos Tefillah 2:19

⁷ Rosh Hashona 8b ד"ה סדר ברכות

⁸ Brachos 34a

The Alter Rebbe⁹ includes *Zochreinu Lechaim* as one of the insertions that were added by the Geonim. This is the opinion of the Rosh¹⁰ and Tur¹¹.

Beis Dovid¹² is of the view that the insertions added to the beginning and end of the Yomim Noraim Amidah come from the Anshei Knesses Hagedola who composed the Amidah itself. Accordingly, *Zochreinu Lechaim* was composed in the early Mishnaic era.

Mesechta Sofrim¹³ teaches 'just as the conclusion (of the blessings) of Rosh Hashona and Yom Kippur are different from other Yomim Tovim, so too are their prayers (different). And we do not mention *Zichronos* (remembrances) in the first 3 or final 3 (Brachos of the Amidah) except on the two days of Rosh Hashona and on Yom Kippur.'

Whilst *Zochreinu* is not explicitly mentioned, it is understood that the '*Zichronos*' referred to by Mesechta Sofrim are the additions of *Zochreinu Lechaim* added to the first Brocha of the Amidah and *B'sefer Chaim* added to the final Brocha¹⁴. Mesechta Sofrim is one of the minor tractates included in the Talmud. Whilst part of the Talmud, there are differing views on when it was authored.

Reason for the Tefillah and its placement

On Rosh Hashona Hashem we pass before Hashem in judgement. In the Tefillah of *Unesaneh Tokef* we say that on Rosh Hashona it is written who will live and who will pass on in the coming year. Therefore on Rosh Hashona we daven to Hashem for life¹⁵.

The reason we ask Hashem for life using the phraseology of 'remember' is because we find a connection between remembrance and life in Yechezkel¹⁶.

וּבְשׁוּב צְדִיק מִצְדִּיקוֹ וְעָשָׂה עוֹל כָּל הַתּוֹעֲבוֹת אֲשֶׁר-עָשָׂה הִרְשָׁע יַעֲשֶׂה וְחִי כָל-צְדִיקוֹ [צְדִיקוֹתָיו] אֲשֶׁר-עָשָׂה לֹא תִזְכְּרֶנָּה בְּמַעַל אֲשֶׁר-מָעַל וּבַחֲטָאתוֹ אֲשֶׁר-חָטָא בָּם יָמוּת: וְאָמַרְתֶּם לֹא יִתֵּן דֶּרֶךְ אֲדֹנָיִי שְׂמֵעוּ-נָא בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל הַדֶּרֶךְ לֹא יִתֵּן הֲלֹא דִרְכֵיכֶם לֹא יִתְּנֶנּוּ: בְּשׁוּב צְדִיק מִצְדִּיקוֹ וְעָשָׂה עוֹל וּמֵת עָלֵיהֶם בְּעוֹלוֹ אֲשֶׁר-עָשָׂה יָמוּת: וּבְשׁוּב רָשָׁע מִרְשָׁעוֹ אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה יַעֲשֶׂה מִשְׁפָּט וְצִדְקָה הוּא אֶת-נַפְשׁוֹ יַחְיֶה:

²⁴So, too, if a righteous person turns away from his righteousness and does wrong, practicing the very abominations that the wicked person practiced, shall he live? None of the righteous deeds that he did shall be remembered; because of the treachery he has practiced and the sins he has committed—because of these, he shall die... ²⁷And if a wicked person turns back from the wickedness that he practiced and does what is just and right, such a person shall save his life.

⁹ Shulchan Aruch Harav OC 581:6

¹⁰ End of Brachos chapter 1

¹¹ OC 582

¹² Siman 365

¹³ 19:8

¹⁴ As understood by Ramban

¹⁵ Beis Yosef OC 582, Levush 582

¹⁶ 18:24-27

Posuk 24 says that when a righteous person become wicked, they will die and none of their righteous deeds will be remembered. Posuk 27 says that if the wicked person does Teshuvah, they will live. Contextually this implies that they will live and their deeds will be remembered¹⁷.

These Pesukim reflect the motif of Teshuvah, a central theme of Rosh Hashona and Yom Kippur.

Zochreinu Lechaim is placed in the first Brocha of the Amidah just before its conclusion Magen Avraham. This is because we find the term remembrance used in connection to Avraham Avinu¹⁸ in the verse *וַיִּשְׁמַע וַיִּקְרָא אֶת־דְּבַר קְדֻשּׁוֹ אֶת־אַבְרָהָם עַבְדּוֹ*, 'He remembers His sacred promise to His servant Abraham'¹⁹.

Avudraham writes that *Zochreinu Lechaim* alludes to the fact that all of our deeds are written before Hashem in a book of remembrance as it says in the verse *וַיִּשְׁמַע וַיִּקְרָא לְפָנָיו לִירְאֵי ה' וְלַחֲשָׁבֵי שְׁמוֹ* – Hashem hearkened and heard it. And a book of remembrance was written before Him for those who feared Hashem and for those who valued His name highly²⁰.

Numerology; the number of words

The Tur²¹ writes that the 11 words in *Zochreinu Lechaim* correspond to three Pesukim connected to Teshuvah that also have 11 words;

הַחֲפֹץ אַחֲפֹץ מוֹת רָשָׁע נֶאֱמַר אֲדֹנָי ה' הֲלוֹא בְּשׁוּבוֹ מִדְּרָכָיו יַחֲיֶה:

Is it my desire that a wicked person shall die?—says the Hashem. It is rather that he shall turn back from his ways and live²².

וּבְשׁוּבוֹ רָשָׁע מִרְשָׁעָתוֹ אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה וַיַּעַשׂ מִשְׁפָּט וּצְדִיקָה הוּא אֶת־נַפְשׁוֹ יַחֲיֶה:

And if a wicked person turns back from the wickedness that he practiced and does what is just and right, such a person shall save his life²³.

The Beis Yosef notes that this Posuk actually has 12 words. He explains that the word יחיה is not part of the count. Maharlnach writes that the word את is not counted as it is an adjunct to the word נפשו.

וְעוֹד בָּהּ עֶשְׂרִיָּה וְשִׁבְעָה וְהִיתָה לְבַעַר כְּאַלֶּה וְכַאֲלוֹן אֲשֶׁר בְּשִׁלְכָתָּ מִצֵּבֶת בָּם זָרַע קֹדֶשׁ מִצֵּבֶתָּה:

But while a tenth part yet remains in it, it shall repent. It shall be ravaged like the terebinth and the oak, of which stumps are left even when they are felled: its stump shall be a holy seed²⁴.

¹⁷ Tur OC 582 as explained by Beis Yosef. See Perisha who writes that there is a printing error in the verse quoted by the Tur and its should reference Yechezkel 18:21-22

¹⁸ Tur OC 582

¹⁹ Tehillim 105:42

²⁰ Malachi 3:16

²¹ ibid

²² Yechezkel 18:23

²³ Yechezkel 18:27

²⁴ Yishayahu 6:13

Beis Yosef notes that this verse has 15 words. He offers two explanations. עוד בה. 10. עשיריה means 10. עוד בה implies something in addition i.e. 11. Alternatively there are 11 words after the word ושוב – return. Bach quotes Rabbi Avraham of Prague that the 15 words of the Posuk parallel the 11 words of *Zochreinu Lechaim* together with the concluding words of the Brocha מלך עוזר ומושיע ומגן.

Siddur Chassidei Ashkenaz notes that the 15 words from זכרנו until ומגן, correspond to the 15 words in the verse וזכרתי את־בריתי יעקוב ואף את־בריתי יצחק ואף את־בריתי אברהם אזכר והארץ אזכר, *Then will I remember My covenant with Jacob; I will remember also My covenant with Isaac, and also My covenant with Abraham; and I will remember the land*²⁵. This verse also refers to the idea of remembrance for blessing and is connected to the Brocha of Avos (the Patriarchs) in which *Zochreinu* is added.

Siddur Yavetz of Rabbi Yaakov Emden offers a Kabbalistic explanation based on the teachings of the Ariza"l. The number 11 has deep Kabbalistic significance, as we find in the 11 spices of the Ketores. The number 11 refers to the 10 aspects (Sefiros) of Kelipah together with the G-dly vitality that vitalises them²⁶. These are the source of *Dinim*. When faced with these *Dinim* on the Yom Hadin, we ask Hashem to remember us for life.

Numerology; the number of letters

The Tur writes that *Zochreinu Lechaim* has 68 letters. This includes the letters in the words מלך עוזר ומושיע ומגן. How the exact calculation is made assumes that some of the words are spelled *Maleh* (with extra letters)²⁷. The number 68 is the Gematria of חיים – life- which we are davening for in this passage.

The Tur notes that the 68 letters corresponds to the 68 words in the Parsha of the Korbanos of Rosh Hashona in Parshas Pinchas. It also corresponds to the 68 *Alefs* in the Aseres Hadibros²⁸. The Aseres Hadibros represents the Torah which is called עץ חיים – a Tree of Life. We ask Hashem to remember us for life in the merit of the Torah²⁹.

Siddur Yaavetz writes that the 50 letters in *Zochreinu Lechaim* (without the concluding words of the Brocha) corresponds to the 50 gateways of Binah. בינה has the same Gematria as חיים, 68.

²⁵ Vayikra 26:42

²⁶ Chassidus explains that the Sefiros of Kedusha are connected to the number 10. In Kedusha the Sefiros possess the element of Bittul and are therefore Keilim for the Divine light which rests within them and unites with them. Their G-dly life-force is therefore not something separate from them. However, the forces of Kelipah lack Bittul and are therefore not Keilim for the Divine light that vitalise them to unite within them. Instead this Divine vitality remains outside of the Sefiros. Hence the Kelipos are associated with the number 11.

²⁷ See Perisha, Beis Yosef, Bach and Darkei Moshe. See there for a discussion on variant texts of the Tur and the resulting explanation.

²⁸ The first recording of the Aseres Hadibros in Parshas Yisro. Beis Yosef.

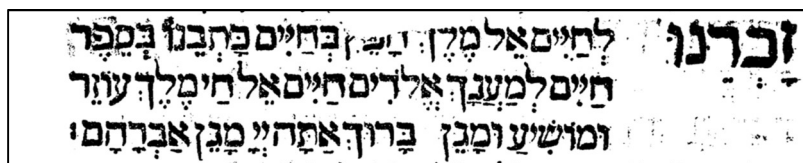
²⁹ Tur ibid

Other Nuschaos

The counts of letters and words above is based on the common Nusach of *Zochreinu Lechaim*. There are other differing Nuschaos which are found in the writings of the Poskim and in older versions of the Machzor.

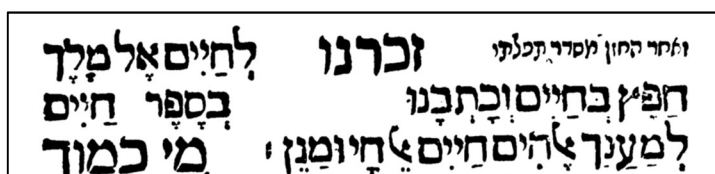
The Nusach of the Beis Yosef conclude חי למענך אלקים חיים א-ל חי and then concludes מלך עוזר ומושיע ומגן. See right for image of this Nusach. Birkei Yosef³⁰ writes that those who have this

custom need not change. However others argue that one should not recite this Nusach³¹.



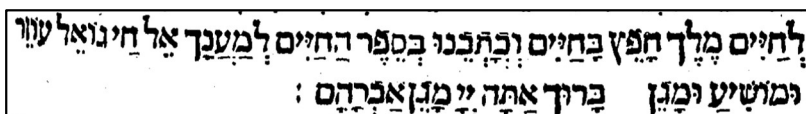
Machzor Minhag Hasefardim, Kushta 1532 (5292)

Sharei Orah³² quotes a very different Nusach; זכרנו לחיים א-ל מלך חפץ בחיים וכתבנו בספר החיים למענך אלוקים חיים א-ל חי ומגן. This is also the Nusach recorded by Avudraham. This Nusach is found in the Minhag Barcelona (right).



Machzor Minhag Barcelona, Salonika 1527 (5287)

Other Nuschaos have extra

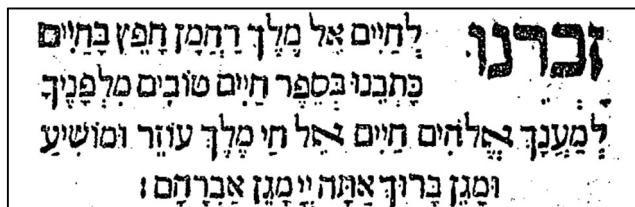


Machzor Pano 1503 (5263)

words including למענך א-ל חי

in Machzor Pano (5263) and Minhag Roma – Bologna

The Machzor Aram Tzova, Venice (5287) depicted to the right, has a very different text.



Machzor Aram Tzova, Venice 1527 (5287)

Lechaim or Lechaim Tovim?

In *Zochreinu Lechaim* we do not say לחיים טובים (adding the word *Tovim* to ask for good life)³³. One reason is because as explained above, this Piyut should have only 11 words³⁴.

Mahara"m Rottenburg notes that at the end of the Amidah we do ask Hashem to inscribe us for a good life when we say לחיים טובים. He explains that when one makes requests, they should first ask for something smaller (חיים) and only afterwards ask for a greater blessing (חיים טובים). The distinction of the Mahara"m is brought by the Alter Rebbe in Shulchan Aruch³⁵.

³⁰ 582:6

³¹ Divrei Yosef

³² Quoted in Beis Yosef ibid

³³ See image of Machzor Vitri above which has the Nusach לחיים טובים

³⁴ Tur ibid. Match Efraim 582:12

³⁵ 582:8

Pri Megadim³⁶ explains that these two additions are discussing different things. In *Zochreinu Lechaim* we are asking for *חיי הנשמה* – spiritual and eternal life for the soul. This life is certainly good and therefore we do not need to specify *טובים חיים*. In *וכתוב לחיים טובים* we are asking for our physical life in this world. This life can come with difficulties and suffering and so we need to specify that our request is for good life.

Lechaim not Lachaim

The Mahara"m also writes that the word *לחיים* should be pronounced *Lechaim* – with a *Shva* under the Lamed, rather than *Lachaim* – with a *Patach* under the Lamed. Pronouncing the word *Lachaim* could sound like we are saying *Lo Chaim*, 'not life'. Generally when it comes to davening, it is the *kavanah* that is more important. But during the *Yemei Hadin* we need to take extra care in clearly enunciating the prayers to avoid arousing *Din*. During the rest of the year there is not the same level of concern. Therefore for example, in *Hashkiveinu* in Maariv we say *Vehamideinu Lachaim*³⁷. This ruling of the Mahara"m is also quoted by the Alter Rebbe in *Shulchan Aruch*³⁸.

Should Zochreinu Lechaim be said at all?

Whilst reciting *Zochreinu Lechaim* is universally accepted as *Halacha*, it is interesting to note that not everyone agreed that it should be said.

The Tur writes that according to some of the Geonim, including Baal Halachos Gedolos, *Zochreinu Lechaim* should not be recited. Their reasoning is based on the Gemara³⁹ that one should not make any personal requests during the first three Brachos of the Amidah (which are praise of Hashem).

However Rav Hai Gaon rules that *Zochreinu Lechaim* should be said. The Gemara's concern only applies to personal requests. Requests for the community (*Tzorchei Rabim*) can be made during the first three Brachos. He references Mesechta Sofrim that clearly states that we add *Zichronos* in the first three and concluding three Brachos of the Amidah on Rosh Hashona and Yom Kippur. Nonetheless, he concludes that even this was allowed only with difficulty⁴⁰, presumably because it is still questionable to make requests at this point.

Rashba is also of the view that one can recite *Zochreinu* as it is a request on behalf of the collective of the Jewish people. He likens it to *Yaaleh Veyavo* which is inserted into the concluding three Brachos in the Blessing of the Avodah.

Whilst Mesechta Sofrim and Rav Hai Gaon write that this insertion is only said on the days of Rosh Hashona and Yom Kippur, it has become the custom to recite it throughout Aseres Ymei Teshuvah.

³⁶ Eshel Avraham 582:4

³⁷ Taz 582:2, Magen Avraham 582:4. However, in the Siddur of the Alter Rebbe, the Nusach of Hashkiveinu is also *Lechaim*.

³⁸ 582:7

³⁹ Brachos 34a

⁴⁰ See Ra"n Rosh Hashona 8b quoting Ramban that this is a continuation of the words of Rav Hai Gaon. Perisha understood that this final statement is from the Tur.

If one forgot to recite it

The Tur quotes the opinion of Baal Hatosfos Rabbeinu Yitzchak⁴¹ that if one forgot to say *Zochreinu Lechaim*, they have to go back to recite it just as one needs to go back if one did not say *Hamelech Hakadosh* at the end of the 3rd Brocha⁴².

Rosh argues with Tosfos. Unlike *Hamelech Hakadosh* which is clearly mentioned in the Talmud, *Zochreinu Lechaim* is not mentioned. The Rosh is of the view that *Zochreinu Lechaim* is a *Takana* of the Geonim and therefore one is *Yotzai* even if it was completely omitted. Certainly one need not go back. This is also the view of Ramban.

Bach explains that Rabbeinu Yitzchak is of the view that like the rest of the Nusach of the Amidah, *Zochreinu Lechaim* is a *Kabbalah* from the Anshei Kneses Hagedola. Therefore it is subject to the rule that whoever deviates from the formula of the prayers established by the Chachamim is not *Yotzai* and the Brocha needs to be repeated. The reason it is not mentioned in the Talmud is because everyone accepts that one must repeat the Amidah if it was not recited. The Talmud only mentions *Hamelech Hakadosh* and *Hamelech Hamishpat* which are subject to a *Machlokes* whether one must repeat the Amidah if it was omitted.

Beis Dovid⁴³ brings proof from Mesechta Sofrim⁴⁴ that *Zochreinu* was added to the beginning of the Rosh Hashona Amidah in the times of the Mishna by the Anshei Kneses Hagedola. He questions how the Rosh would address the source in Mesechta Sofrim.

Birkei Yosef writes that these words of the Beis Dovid “are difficult to hear”. The Tur himself refers to Mesechta Sofrim just before recording the opinion of the Rosh. Further, if *Zochreinu Lechaim* was composed by the Anshei Kneses Hagedola, how could some of the Geonim write that *Zochreinu Lechaim* should not be said?

He also questions the assertion that Mesechta Sofrim was written in the time of the Tannaim, because some of the Amoraim are mentioned in them, including Rav Ashi from the close of the Talmud. After a lengthy discussion, he concludes that the Rosh is of the opinion that Mesechta Sofrim was written in the times of the Geonim.

The Shulchan Aruch⁴⁵ rules like the Rosh that if one forgot *Zochreinu Lechaim* and has concluded the Brocha⁴⁶, they do not go back. The Alter Rebbe⁴⁷ writes that this means after reciting Hashem’s name at the conclusion of the Brocha even if they have not concluded the Brocha itself. Magen Avraham⁴⁸ writes that even if one wants to, they are not allowed to go back as this would be a *Brocha Levatala*⁴⁹.

⁴¹ ד"ה והלכתא 12ב Tosfos Brachos

⁴² Being that it is in the first three Brachos one would need to go back to the beginning of the Amidah.

⁴³ ibid

⁴⁴ 19:8

⁴⁵ OC 582:5

⁴⁶ Ram"o ibid quoting Terumas Hadeshen

⁴⁷ 582:6

⁴⁸ 582:4

⁴⁹ Shulchan Aruch Harav ibid

Saying Zochreinu out loud in the Chazan's repetition

In many congregations during *Chazoras Hashatz*, the community says *Zochreinu* out loud before the Chazzan. They do the same for *Mi Chamocha Av Harachaman*⁵⁰.

Chabad custom is that the congregation does not say either *Zochreinu* or *Mi Chamocha* during *Chazoras Hashatz*⁵¹. We do however say *Uchesov Lechaim Tovim* and *Bsefer Chaim* at the end of the Amidah.

The Rebbe⁵² questions our custom of reciting *Mi Chamocha* by the community as this is not a request but rather praise of Hashem. Even though *Zochreinu* is a request, the reason Chabad custom is that the community does not recite it during the repetition is because after having requested the greater blessing of *Uchesov Lechaim Tovim* in their private Amidah, it is not appropriate for them to return and ask for the smaller request of *Zochreinu Lechaim*.

Explanations of the Tefillah

Machzor Vitri

Machzor Vitri explains that on Rosh Hashona, the Day of Judgment, all pass before Hashem like sheep before their shepherd. Rabbi Yochanan⁵³ explains that we are all 'remembered' in one remembrance. Therefore we daven to be remembered for life.

We refer to Hashem as the King Who desires life because He does not want the sinner to die on account of his sins, but rather to do Teshuvah and live, as it says in the Posuk *'it is not My desire that the wicked shall die, but that the wicked turn from his [evil] ways and live. Return*⁵⁴

The Book of Life refers to the Book of Tzaddikim, who are inscribed for eternal life.

Rabbi Yehudah ben Yakar

Rabbi Yehudah ben Yakar, the teacher of the Ramban, wrote a Pirush on the Tefillos. He explains *Zochreinu Lechaim* as follows;

On Rosh Hashona the world is created and so we ask Hashem, of all of Creation, to remember the Jewish people, as it says *זכר עדתך קניית קדם גאלת שבט נחלתך הר־ציון זה שכנת בו*, *Remember the community You made Yours long ago, Your very own tribe that You redeemed, Mount Zion, where You dwell*⁵⁵.

The King Who desires life; Only those who are living can serve Hashem and praise Him. The dead cannot. This includes the wicked, who even in their lifetime are called 'dead'. Hashem desires the

⁵⁰ Likutei Mahari"ch 68:1, Ktzei Hamateh 584:24

⁵¹ See Bnei Yissaschar Tishrei 2:23 and Mateh Efraim 584:10. This is also the Minhag of Belz, Skver and Sanz

⁵² Igros Kodesh 3:410

⁵³ Rosh Hashona 18a

⁵⁴ Yechezkel 33:11

⁵⁵ Tehillim 74:2

Tzaddikim, who even in their death are called 'living'. Hashem says that the Tzaddikim who serve Me every day through their Torah and declare My oneness in life and in death, I will give them great honour under the Tree of Life in Gan Eden. In their graves I will give them rest and they will arise every Erev Shabbos, Rosh Chodesh and Yomim Tovim to praise My name.

According to his Nusach, the word *Lechaim* is mentioned 3 times which he connects to the 3 books which are open before Hashem on Rosh Hashona

Eitz Yosef

The Pirush Eitz Yosef on the Siddur writes that there are 2 very different types of life. The first life is one lived in pursuit of worldly pleasures such as eating fine delicacies and chasing after honour. The Zohar says that those who asks Hashem to fulfil their physical desires are like brazen dogs who call out 'Give! Give!' with no shame.

The second type of life is one lived to fulfil the will of Hashem. One can only serve Hashem and work on perfecting themselves and correcting their deficiencies while they are alive in this world as it says in Pirkei Avos *יפה שעה אחת בתשובה ומעשים טובים בעולם הזה, מכל חיי העולם הבא*, *one hour of Teshuvah and good deeds in this world is worth more than all of the World to Come*⁵⁶.

In *Zochreinu Lechaim*, we are asking Hashem to remember us for this latter type of life. This is the meaning of the conclusion *למענך אלקים חיים*. We ask Hashem for life, not to pursue physical pleasures, but 'for Your sake O Living G-d', to live our lives for Hashem and give Him *Nachas Ruach* from our service of Torah and Mitzvos.

Chassidus

The Rebbe Rashab

In a fascinating Reshima, the Friedlike Rebbe describes how his father, the Rebbe Rashab (who had passed away) appeared to him in a vision on the first night of Rosh Hashona 5685. The Rebbe Rashab was wearing Shabbos clothing and his face was shining. He said an explanation on *Zochreinu Lechaim*;

זכרנו לחיים מלך חפץ בחיים – The fact that Hashem remembers us for life is a pure act of (unearned) kindness and benevolence, because *טבע הטוב להיטיב* - it is the nature of one (Hashem) who is good to do good to others.

וכתבנו בספר החיים - However Hashem writing us in the Book for Life, that it should translate into a good and peaceful life, is dependent on our Avodah. That Avodah is *למענך אלוקים חיים*, that through Torah and Mitzvos we transform *Elokim*, a name which represents *Tzimtum* and *Din* (concealment of the Divine light in the world) into *Chaim* – open revelation of G-dliness.

⁵⁶ Avos 4:17

Likutei Levi Yitzchak

The Rebbe's father, Harav Hamekubal Rabbi Levi Yitzchak Schneersohn explains⁵⁷ that in *Zochreinu Lechaim*, we are not just asking for life. Our blessings generally fall into 3 categories; בני חיי ומזוני – children, life (health) and Parnasa. The Talmud⁵⁸ teaches that there are 4 who are considered as though they were dead. One of these is a pauper and another is one who does not have children. Therefore in our request that Hashem remember us for life, we are requesting all 3 of these blessings.

Siddur Mahari"d

Rabbi Yitzchok Dovid of Liadi, a grandson of the Tzemach Tzedek, writes that the four times we say the word חיים in *Zochreinu Lechaim* correspond to the 4 letters in Hashem's name and to the 4 worlds discussed in Kabbalah; *Atzilus*, *Beriah*, *Yetzirah* and *Asiyah*. It also parallels the 4 stages of existence; this world (*Olam Haze*), the World to Come (*Olam Haba*), the era of Moshiach (*Yemos Hamoshiach*) and the era of the resurrection (*Olam Hatechiya*).

One only needs to remember something that could otherwise be forgotten. We can forget things which are distant, insignificant or far removed from us. In comparison to Hashem's essence all of the worlds of created existence are completely insignificant and 'distant'. Therefore, on Rosh Hashona when all of these levels or worldly existence are renewed, we appeal to Hashem to 'remember' us.

We appeal to Hashem as the King Who desires life. Chassidus explains the difference between *Ratzon* and *Chefetz*, will verses desire. *Ratzon* refers to an external desire, corresponding to the level of *Arich Anpin* – the external dimension of Kesser. *Chefetz* means desire. This refers to an inner desire which denotes pleasure, corresponding to the inner dimension of Kesser – *Atik Yomin*. We arouse Hashem's blessing for life from this deeper level of *Chefetz*.

We refer to Hashem as *Elokim Chaim*, the Living G-d, because He is the only true being. Whereas all other life is dependent upon His existence, His existence is not dependent on anything else.

Mahari"d – a second explanation

The first 3 mentions of חיים correspond to the 3 books that are open before Hashem on Rosh Hashona.

- זכרנו לחיים corresponds to the Tzaddikim who are remembered immediately and inscribed for life.
- מלך חפץ בחיים corresponds to the *Reshaim* (wicked) who are inscribed immediately for the opposite of life. Nonetheless, Hashem desires that the *Reshaim* also live, by doing Teshuvah. This is reflected in the Posuk 'it is not My desire that the wicked shall die, but that the wicked turn from his [evil] ways and live.'
- כתבנו בספר החיים refers to the Beinonim who are not written immediately. Instead, their judgement is suspended until Yom Kippur.

⁵⁷ Likutei Levi Yitzchak Igros Kodesh page 382

⁵⁸ Nedarim 64b

Even if we do not do Teshuvah and would otherwise be punished, we appeal to Hashem with the fourth reference of חיים – למענך אלקים חיים, asking Hashem to atone for us and grant us life for His sake, as a gift from His absolute kindness in a manner of *Isarusa Deleila*, even if we ourselves are undeserving.

Sifrei Chassidus

In the year 5654, the Sfas Emes explained that on Rosh Hashona Hashem grants us life. We ask Him that it should be למענך בספר החיים, that we be written for a life lived for Your sake.

The Tiferes Shlomo offers a similar insight. We ask Hashem that we merit a life that is purely in fulfilment of Hashem's will and keeping His Mitzvos. Then מלך חפץ בחיים, Hashem desires this type of life, life which is למענך – for Your sake.

Conclusion

During Neilah of Yom Kippur when our Judgement is concluded, we change the Nusach from כתבנו to חתמנו. Instead of asking Hashem to inscribe us for life, we ask Hashem to seal us for life.

Rabbi Yehudah ben Yakar connects this to the Midrash Rabbah Rus⁵⁹ which says that originally, when a person would do a Mitzvah, the Novi (prophet) would record it (for all generations). But now (when there are no more prophets) who will record it? The Midrash answers that Eliyahu and Moshiach transcribe our Mitzvos and Hashem Himself seals that which they have written. This is alluded to in the verse;

אֲזַנְדָּבְרוּ יִרְאֵי ה' אִישׁ אֶת רֵעֵהוּ וַיִּקְשֹׁב ה' וַיִּשְׁמַע וַיִּכְתֹּב סֵפֶר זִכְרוֹן לְפָנָיו לִירְאֵי ה' וּלְחֹשְׁבֵי שְׁמוֹ

Then the G-d-fearing men spoke to one another, and Hashem hearkened and heard it. And a book of remembrance was written before Him for those who feared the Lord and for those who valued His name highly⁶⁰.

Eliyahu and Moshiach, the G-d-fearing men will speak with one another to record our merits. When they do, Hashem Himself comes to listen and seals it in the book of remembrance.

May we all be written and sealed this Rosh Hashona and Yom Kippur for חיים, which includes within it blessings for בני חיי ומזוני, children, health and prosperity. And may our חיים be למענך, a meaningful life devoted to the service of Hashem.

May we merit the immediate coming of both Eliyahu Hanovi and Moshiach who have transcribed all of the Mitzvos performed by the Jewish people for thousands of years. Then we will merit the ultimate חיים of נצחיים, eternal life with the Geulah Shleimah now.

⁵⁹ 5:6

⁶⁰ Malachi 3:16