

I generally mention the מנהגים that I have to those family members who are interested in hearing about them. Sometimes I tell people I think it's a worthwhile מנהג. Sometimes I tell them it's my מנהג, if you want to do it, you can, if you don't want to do it, you don't have to. One מנהג which I have, which I've told everybody, is you never run across the street, you only walk. I got that from my father ע"ה, that's not a מנהג, that's a אב כיבוד. So, an unusual מנהג which is referable to הושענא רבה, which I've never divulged to anybody, but I do it every year, is that there are a lot of things to say in the מהזור by הושענות. When I do הושענות with Bobbi, we leave out all the little words and I just have her say the big words, this way we can get through it in a fairly reasonable length of time, probably under three minutes. One of the phrases we say is אָנָּה קָל נָא הוֹשֶׁעַ נָא וְהוֹשִׁיעָה נָא אֲבִינוּ אֶתָּה. There's a beautiful מעשה from R' Elimelech of Lizhensk that conveys an extremely powerful thought.

R' Yeshaya Bardaki, one of the founders of the old ישוב in ירושלים, was the rav of Pinsk. After his wife, נעבעך, passed away, he decided to take his two young children to ארץ ישראל in search of a new start. As the ship they were on approached the holy soil, a fierce storm broke out. The ship was not able to withstand the driving rain and powerful winds. Their destination was already visible when a gale ripped the ship into two, leaving the passengers on their own in the tempestuous waters. R' Yeshaya attempted valiantly to hang on to his two children and swim to shore, but he could not. As the three of them thrashed about, R' Yeshaya lost his hold on his little daughter, who began to drift away. The girl cried out, "Father, save me! I have no other father but you." R' Yeshaya thought he would never be able to do it, but when he heard her heart-rending call, it filled him with a surge of strength and determination. "I have no other father but you." These words drove him toward her. Somehow, he managed to catch her and to swim to shore with both of his wonderful children. Years later, R' Yeshaya, who had become a revered rav in ארץ ישראל, in ירושלים, was preparing to leave this world. He called his beloved daughter close and told her he owed her a debt of gratitude. "With these words," he told her, "You taught me how to really ask. When I find myself in difficult situations, I think of your words, and I call out to Hashem from the depths of my soul, רבונו של עולם, you are my only Father. I have no one else but you. So where else should I turn?" I realized that if I, limited in strength, responded to these words, then He who has the כח and the power to answer any call would certainly respond. For this, my daughter, I thank you."

Here we stand at the culmination of a season of pleading, and we know deep inside, our תשובה was lacking. We might well be unworthy of the ברכות that we ask for. So, like the little girl in that stormy sea, we cry out, הוֹשֶׁעַ נָא וְהוֹשִׁיעָה נָא - Help us and save us. Why? אֲבִינוּ אֶתָּה - We have no other father but you. I'm going to think of that of course, this הושענא רבה. Whether or not we are deserving, or whether or not our request is in place, please have רחמנות on us. If the entire month has been one of crying, this is the moment to emit that final, heartfelt cry.

הושענא רבה is a tough יום טוב for all of us regular guys, for those of us who say all those words, who are running to catch up, to keep up with the חזן and bang those ערבות. In our hurry and our rush, we sometimes lose sight of what we're really doing. We're putting in that real request from the One Who can answer us and nobody else. So let's give it a moment's thought, at least one moment.

